RICHARD CORBEN

DIMWOOD™

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RICHARD CORBEN
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DIMWOOD

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For you, mr. c.
We did it!
My everlasting love.
mrs. c

For my Dad–
He was an amazing artist; he was also a warm,
funny, loving Dad. I am so grateful he was in my life.
This book is the last project he and I worked on together.
You never know when it's going to be the last time.

RICHARD CORBEN: A MIND ON FIRE

JOE R. LANSDALE

When I was a kid, only four or five, I discovered comics. We called them funny books back then. The moment I was introduced to them, fireworks went off in my head. I knew then I wanted to write and draw them.

I made my own comics that my mother dutifully stapled together for me. It was noted that my drawings, according to my mother, relatives, and people she knew, revealed me to be a gifted artist.

When I was older, my art was still pretty much the same level, and struggle hard as I might, it never improved. Turned out I wasn't gifted to begin with. I was more of a storyteller than an illustrator. But thanks, Mom. You meant well.

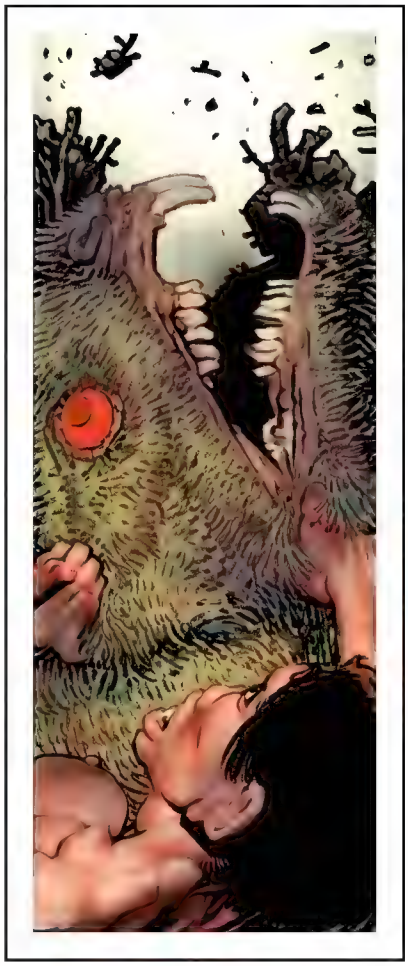
With unlimited practice, I might have reached the level of one of those gorillas that was trained to paint, though that too was unlikely. The gorillas put their soul into their work. I just smeared paint around and my pencil drawings were always messy and the hands and feet of the characters I drew looked funny. They weren't hands that could pick up a rock, wipe their butt, or pleasure themselves. They had round fists and round feet. They appeared to have been drawn by a teddy bear mimicking its own constructs.

Because of this experience, my failings as an illustrator, what impressed me was just how amazing a truly gifted artist is.

I remember first seeing Corben's work in underground publications, and as soon as I did, I knew this was an artist on fire with a steady eye and a steady hand, but mostly with a unique understanding of style and story. He may have learned things from schooling, but

no amount of schooling alone can produce a Richard Corben.

He saw things differently. He looked around corners. He understood the rules of illustration, and therefore knew how to break them. He was also brave. He went there with his work. *Den* was the comic I liked best due to it being a ground breaker, not afraid of nudity or violence, and the protagonist wasn't exactly a Boy Scout. Den's world was a world where survival was all, and Den was damn sure a survivor.



In the beginning, Den was a not-so-magnificent specimen. He was downright scrawny. Women didn't find him attractive or interesting. So, as anyone scrawny and rejected by women would, he builds a machine using directions left to him by his uncle. Once the device is finished, it cracks open the barriers between our world and another called Neverwhere. Through this crack, Den enters an apocalyptic landscape where he is transformed into a nude, muscular, bald, hero with an enormous penis, of course.

This storyline really appealed to me due to the fact it reminded me of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Martian novels, favorites of mine, and the main reason I became a writer. Den's adventures are like a magnificent fever dream. I was hooked.

My next remembered exposure to his work were Warren titles like *Creepy* and *Eerie*. His art style was distinct.

Corben was a knife in the ribs. A poke in the eye. His work was sensual and graphic. His characters popped. He was never monotonous. You didn't confuse him for anyone else, though he certainly has imitators. You can't imitate what he does. It's too personal, too distinctive.

Even when Corben illustrated tales by other authors, like Edgar Allen Poe, work he did for Dark Horse comics, his magic shone through the stories in such a way as to make them a true collaboration, as if the authors were actually in the same room discussing ravens and corpses and black cats while Corben sketched out adaptation ideas.

When I was writing occasional comics for DC, I was fortunate enough to have Corben illustrate one of my stories, "The Split," and beautifully done it was. I don't really remember my story all that much. It wasn't bad, but Corben's art elevated it in such a way as to make it seem far better than it actually was. His imagery I well remember. I hardly remember my story at all.

Awards? He's received more than a few.

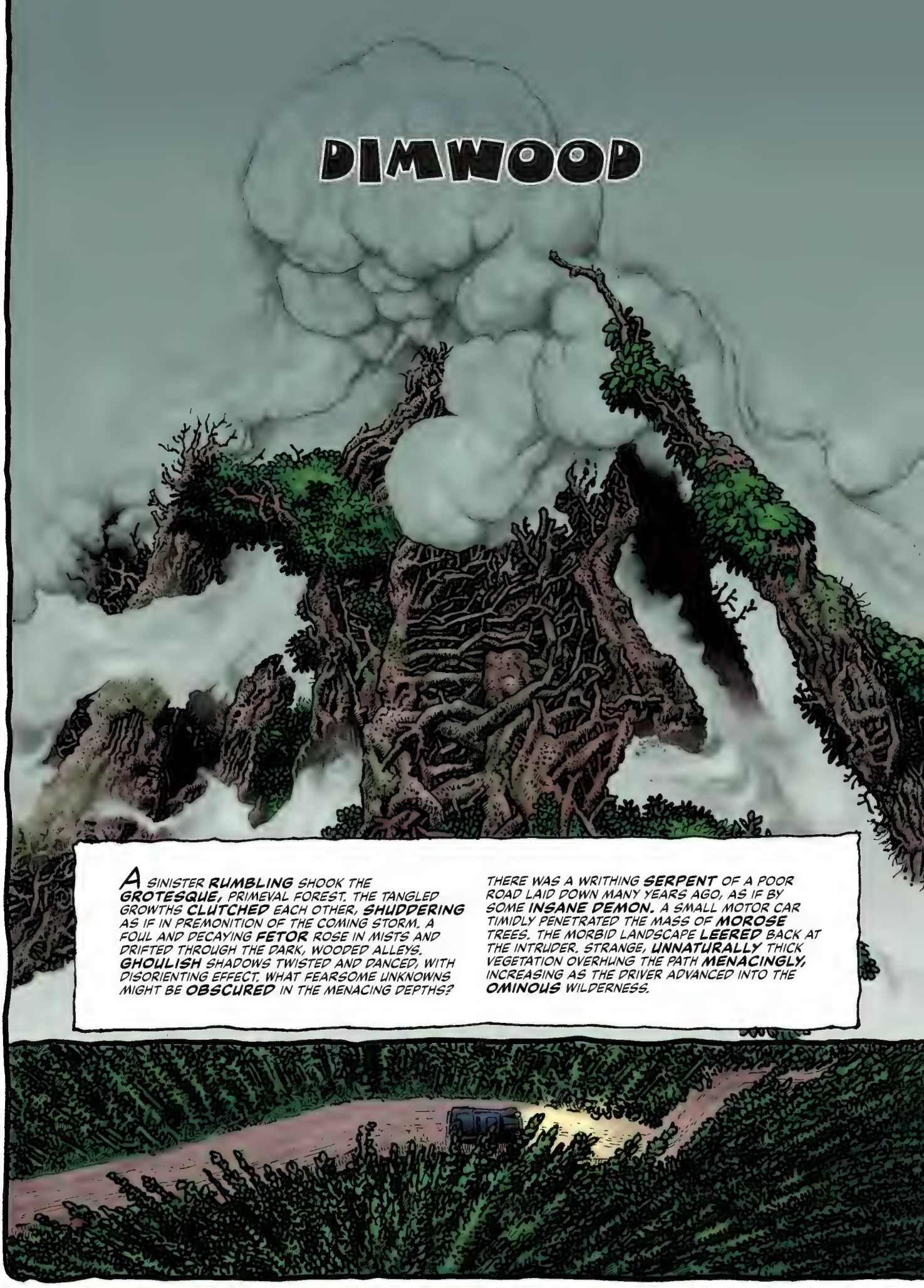
Respect as an illustrator? Oh yeah, big time.

Influence? You bet.

But talk is not what finished art is about. It's about observing. It's not about me telling you how amazing it is. Corben's art is for the eye to see and for the excited heart to feel.

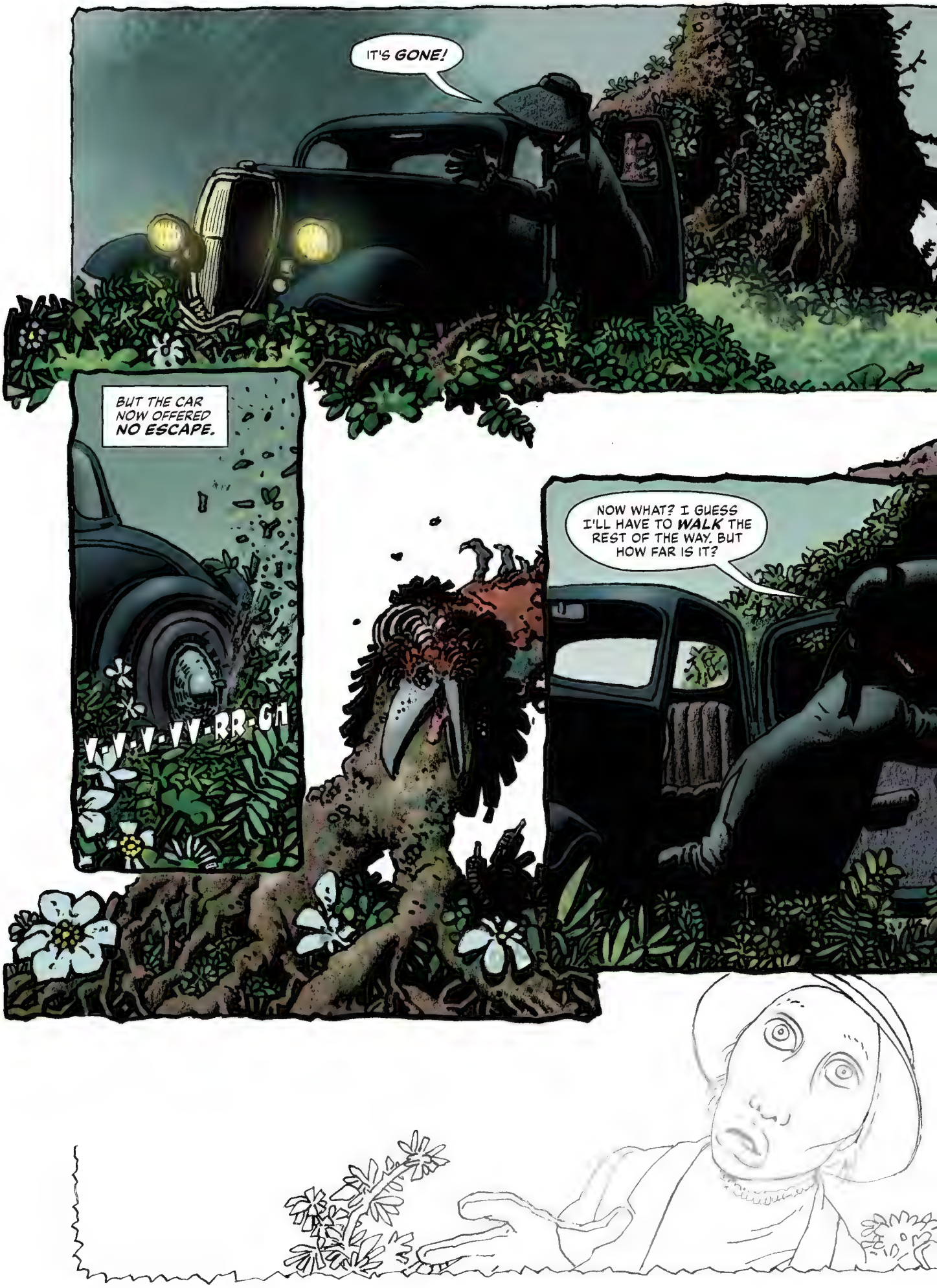
So turn away from this intro and dive into the belly of the beast.

And be amazed.


DIMWOOD
A SINISTER RUMBLING SHOOK THE GROTESQUE, PRIMEVAL FOREST. THE TANGLED GROWTHS CLUTCHED EACH OTHER, SHUDDERING AS IF IN PREMONITION OF THE COMING STORM. A FOUL AND DECAYING FETOR ROSE IN MISTS AND DRIFTED THROUGH THE DARK, WOODED ALLEYS. GHOULISH SHADOWS TWISTED AND DANCED, WITH DISORIENTING EFFECT. WHAT FEARSOME UNKNOWNS MIGHT BE OBSCURED IN THE MENACING DEPTHS?
THERE WAS A WRITHING SERPENT OF A POOR ROAD LAID DOWN MANY YEARS AGO, AS IF BY SOME INSANE DEMON. A SMALL MOTOR CAR TIMIDLY PENETRATED THE MASS OF MOROSE TREES. THE MORBID LANDSCAPE LEERED BACK AT THE INTRUDER. STRANGE, UNNATURALLY THICK VEGETATION OVERHUNG THE PATH MENACINGLY, INCREASING AS THE DRIVER ADVANCED INTO THE OMINOUS WILDERNESS.

HIGH ABOVE THE FOGGY TREES SOMETHING FLUTTERED AND DRIFTED IN THE WARM AIR. IT DESCENDED WITH SOME APPARENT INTENT.
SSSSCCCRRLLLAAAACH!!!

WHAP!
AAH!!
OWH! DAMN IT! WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?


IT'S GONE!
BUT THE CAR NOW OFFERED NO ESCAPE.
V-V-V-VV-RR-GH
NOW WHAT? I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO WALK THE REST OF THE WAY. BUT HOW FAR IS IT?

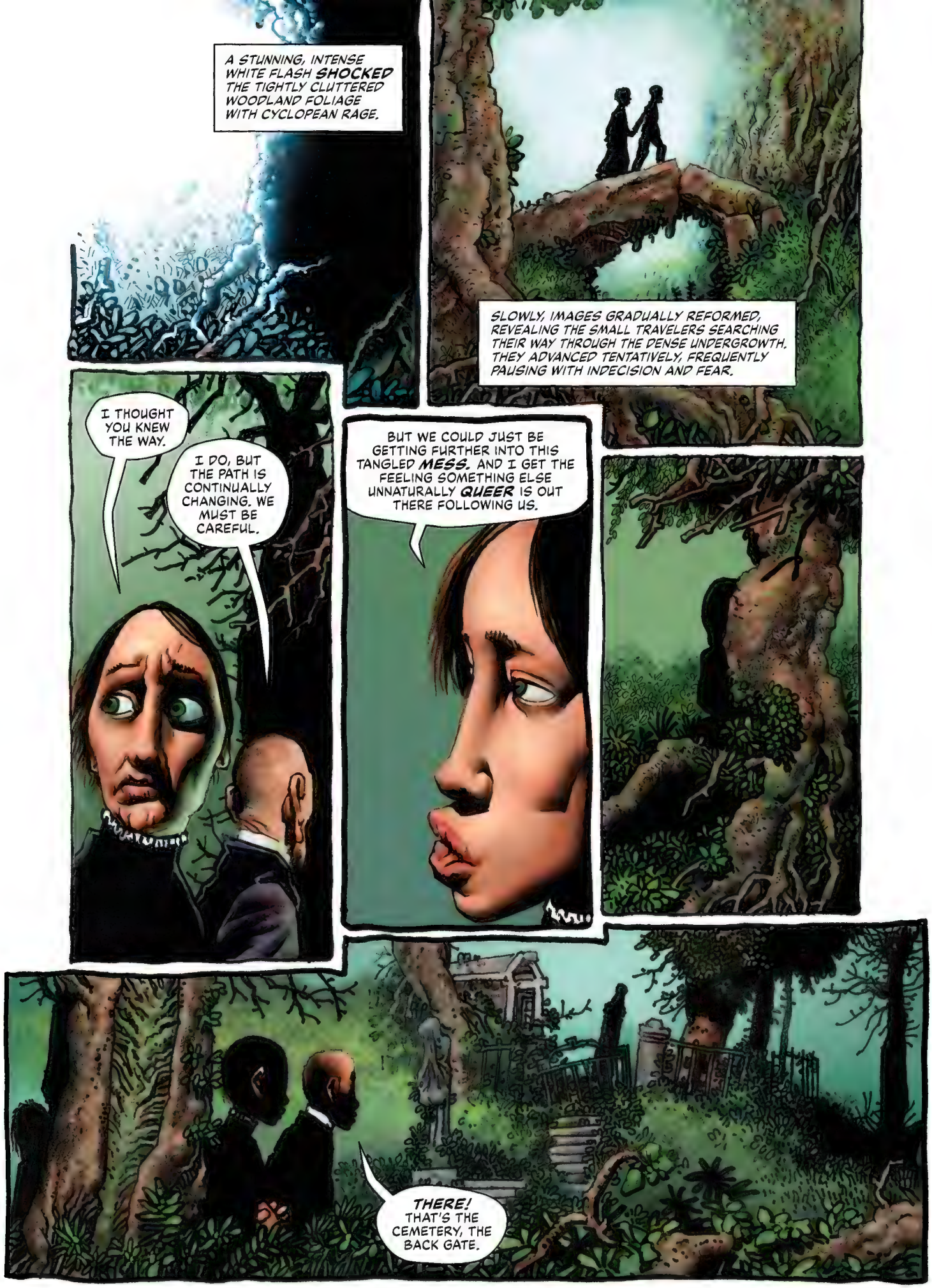
WITHOUT THE PROTECTIVE SHELL OF THE CAR, THE WOMAN SUDDENLY FELT A SENSE OF OVERPOWERING **OPPRESSION**--AND THAT SHE WAS BEING **WATCHED.**
AGAIN, SHE FELT CONSCIOUS OF A WATCHING **PRESENCE.** SHE SLOWLY LOOKED AROUND AND STOPPED. THE GIANT, VEGETATION-TENTACLED TREES COMPLETELY SURROUNDED HER. **SOMETHING** DREW HER ATTENTION... SEVERAL MINUTES PASSED BEFORE SHE REALIZED SHE WAS STARING AT A **LONG-DEAD BIRD.**
A BLINDING FLASH!
--AND SHE WAS RUNNING.

BY THE TIME SHE STOPPED, SHE COULD NO LONGER SEE THE ROAD. THE SKY CONTINUED FLASHING FITFULLY.
THE GROUND WAS COVERED WITH **MOUNDED** UNDERGROWTH THAT LIMITED POSSIBLE WAYS TO ESCAPE.
THAT SHADOW...DID IT **MOVE?**
THE FREQUENT LIGHTNING FLASHES CONFUSED HER PERCEPTION, SUGGESTING A **WEIRD,** FLUTTERING **LIFE** THAT KEPT **PACE** WITH HER.
I FEEL LIKE **HORRIBLE** THINGS HAVE HAPPENED HERE.
IS THAT A **TREE?** OR IS THAT SOMETHING **BEHIND** THE TREE?
IT'S **MOVING!** I KNOW IT.

IT'S FOLLOWING ME! THERE IT IS! AAAH!
AAAAHH!!
OH GOD, IT'S COMING!
OWH!
NO, NO, NO!
K-BUMP!

XERA TREMBLED IN APPREHENSION AS THE SHADOWED FIGURE ADVANCED WITH RELENTLESS DETERMINATION.
WH-WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
AAIIEEH!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, XERA? YOU LOOK AS THOUGH YOU'VE SEEN A GHOST! DON'T YOU KNOW ME? I'M YOUR BROTHER NOAH.
NOAH?! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.
NONE OF THE OTHERS EXPECTED YOU TO COME, BUT I KNEW YOU WOULD. COME ON OUT OF THERE.

N-NO! LEAVE ME ALONE!
I SAW YOUR CAR. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HAVE LOST YOUR WAY IN THESE WOODS, SO I CAME AFTER YOU.
WE USED TO BE SO CLOSE.
YES! I UH--
XERA, WE SHOULD GO. THEY'VE ALREADY STARTED.
NOAH, IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I SAW YOU LAST.
YES. A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE YOU LEFT.


A STUNNING, INTENSE WHITE FLASH SHOCKED THE TIGHTLY CLUTTERED WOODLAND FOLIAGE WITH CYCLOPEAN RAGE.
SLOWLY, IMAGES GRADUALLY REFORMED, REVEALING THE SMALL TRAVELERS SEARCHING THEIR WAY THROUGH THE DENSE UNDERGROWTH. THEY ADVANCED TENTATIVELY, FREQUENTLY PAUSING WITH INDECISION AND FEAR.
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW THE WAY.
I DO, BUT THE PATH IS CONTINUALLY CHANGING. WE MUST BE CAREFUL.
BUT WE COULD JUST BE GETTING FURTHER INTO THIS TANGLED MESS. AND I GET THE FEELING SOMETHING ELSE UNNATURALLY QUEER IS OUT THERE FOLLOWING US.
THERE! THAT'S THE CEMETERY, THE BACK GATE.

OH, GREAT! IT'S RAINING. I HAVE AN UMBRELLA IN MY CAR, FOR ALL THE GOOD IT'LL DO US NOW.
I THINK IT'S GOING TO KEEP UP FOR A WHILE.
THE CEMETERY HAS BECOME OVERGROWN. DOESN'T ANYONE TAKE CARE OF IT?
THE TREES HERE ARE UNHEALTHY AND SWOLLEN. THEY SUCK AN EVIL, LOATHSOME NOURISHMENT FROM BELOW.
WHAT A HORRIBLE THOUGHT! YOU'VE BECOME AWFULLY MORBID WHILE I WAS GONE.
WHAT WAS THAT?
BACK THERE! DIDN'T YOU HEAR IT?
WE SHOULD HURRY.

THERE! THE MEAGER CEREMONY IS NEARLY OVER.
"DON'T CRY FOR ME NOW I HAVE DIED, FOR I'M STILL HERE; I'M BY YOUR SIDE,
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? I DON'T KNOW ANY OF THEM.
IT'S BEEN YEARS, XERA. BUT I THINK YOU KNOW THEM.
THAT'S THE REVEREND MOSES HOQUE, READING THE POEM.
"I AM STILL HERE; I'M ALL AROUND, ONLY MY BODY LIES IN THE GROUND."
LOOK, FURBOL. ISN'T THAT XERA AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?
"I AM THE SUN BRINGING YOU LIGHT, I AM THE STAR SHINING SO BRIGHT.
"I AM THE RAIN REFRESHING THE EARTH, I AM THE LAUGHTER; I AM THE MIRTH.

"MY BODY'S GONE BUT MY SOUL IS HERE, PLEASE DON'T SHED ANOTHER TEAR."
I BELIEVE YOU'RE RIGHT.
YOU REMEMBER OUR COOK, HENNA CLUGG--AND THE HANDYMAN, FURBOL HANQUE.
AND THAT'S MA'S LAWYER, TITUS WURDON.
AND MA'S GOOD FRIENDS, ODNA AND EMIL LAWSON.
"I AM THE BIRD UP IN THE SKY, I AM THE CLOUD THAT'S DRIFTING BY. I AM THE THOUGHTS INSIDE YOUR HEAD, WHILE I'M STILL THERE, I CAN'T BE DEAD."

THEY'RE COMING OVER, SIS. TRY TO PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER.
XERA, DEAR, IS THAT YOU?
YES, HENNA. I'M BACK. I REMEMBER YOU--I COULD NEVER FORGET YOUR WONDERFUL COOKIES.
WE ALL HAVE MISSED YOU SO MUCH.
YOU TWO WERE OUR SECOND PARENTS. IT BROKE MY HEART TO LEAVE YOU BACK-- I--
HELLO, LITTLE MISSY. YOU'VE REALLY GROWN, CHILD.
WILL YOU BE STAYING IN TOWN, DEAR? WE'D LOVE TO VISIT WITH YOU FOR A WHILE.
WE COULD GIVE YOU A LIFT, BUT FURBOL VOLUNTEERED TO DO THE BURYING FIRST.
NO. I'LL BE STAYING AT THE HOUSE--WHAT WAS THAT?
DIDN'T YOU HEAR THAT? IT'S A CHILD, CRYING--BACK THERE AMONG THE GRAVES.

HELP! HELP ME! PLEASE.
THERE SHE IS!
IT'S COMING! IT WANTS TO GET ME!
WAAAAAHHH!!!
COME HERE. NOTHING WILL HARM YOU.
WAAAAHHH!!!
OH, YOU'RE SO COLD, DEAR. LET ME WARM YOU.
WHAT HAS FRIGHTENED YOU SO?
THE DIMWOOD DEVIL IS CHASING ME! IT WANTS TO EAT ME!
IT'S LITTLE KAREN MURSTON. I'LL TAKE HER HOME.
HERE, XERA. I WON'T BE ABLE TO USE THIS WHILE I'M SHOVELING.

WHY, THANK YOU, FURBOL. IT'S VERY KIND OF YOU TO LEND ME YOUR UMBRELLA.
IT WON'T DO ME ANY GOOD. I COULDN'T GET ANY WETTER.
MISS DIM?
MISS DIM, I'M TITUS WURDON, YOUR LATE MOTHER'S LAWYER. A MOMENT, PLEASE.
I'D LIKE TO MEET WITH YOU NEXT WEEK ABOUT YOUR MOTHER'S AFFAIRS.
VERY WELL. I'LL BE STAYING AT THE HOUSE.
THE HOUSE? I THOUGHT-- ER--
OKAY. SHALL WE SAY THURSDAY AFTERNOON?

NO ONE WANTS TO COME TO THE HOUSE.
WHY NOT?
IT'S HAUNTED.
VERY FUNNY. LET'S GO.
ARE YOU SURE YOU REMEMBER THE WAY BACK TO MY CAR?
I REMEMBER.
THESE TREES ARE WEIRD. AND DON'T START ABOUT THEM SUCKING UP THE ROTTEN JUICE AND PUS OF THE BURIED DEAD.
OKAY. I WON'T SAY A WORD.
AND HERE'S YOUR CAR, JUST LIKE I SAID.
GOOD! NOW IF I CAN JUST GET IT ACROSS THAT DITCH.

THE AFTERNOON SUN SENT FEEBLE, TATTERED RAYS OVER THE DRIPPING MORASS. REVEREND HOQUE'S WET LIMOUSINE CREPT CAREFULLY THROUGH THE RUTTED MUDDY POOLS DEFORMING THE UNPAVED PATH.
PRAISE THE LORD, THE RAIN HAS STOPPED.
HERE'S YOUR HOUSE, KAREN. YOUR PARENTS WILL BE HAPPY TO SEE YOU! WHAT MADE YOU RUN OFF LIKE THAT?
WAAAAH!
WHAT'S THE MATTER, DEAR? YOU'RE HOME NOW.
NO! NO! IT'S IN THERE! IT WILL EAT ME!
STAY WITH KAREN, DEAR. I'LL GET HER PARENTS.
THAT'S STRANGE-- THE DOOR IS AJAR.
SOMETHING SEEMS WRONG HERE. HELLO! MRS. MURSTON?

MOSES! SHE'S REALLY SQUIRMING. WHAT A HANDFUL! I'M BRINGING HER IN.
WAAAAAAAH!!
IT'S A SHAMBLES. NO ONE'S HOME.
OH, DEAR GOD! BLOOD EVERYWHERE! DON'T BRING THAT CHILD IN HERE!
IT GET ME!
SHE GOT AWAY!
LITTLE KAREN HAD SEEN SOMETHING HORRIBLE, AND SHE RAN FOR HER LIFE, DEEP INTO THE THICK, DRENCHED FOREST... WHICH WELCOMED HER WITH SINISTER INTENT.

NO TROUBLE THIS TIME.
ONLY THANKS TO MY MORAL SUPPORT...OR PERHAPS IT'S YOUR SILVESTRO SPIRIT HELPING YOU.
THE DRIVE SEEMS LONGER THAN THE WALK WE JUST FINISHED.
XERA, I THINK YOU SHOULD GET A ROOM IN TOWN.
NONSENSE! I WANT TO SEE THE OLD PLACE. I HAVE SOME GOOD MEMORIES FROM THOSE OLD TIMES--
--AND SOME BAD.
:HMPH!:

HENNA AND FURBOL HAVE MOVED OUT. YOU'LL BE ALONE.
NO, I WON'T. YOU'LL BE THERE.
WHY DID YOU STOP?
IT'S JUST-- SOMETHING. WHAT'S THAT STUFF ALL OVER THE--

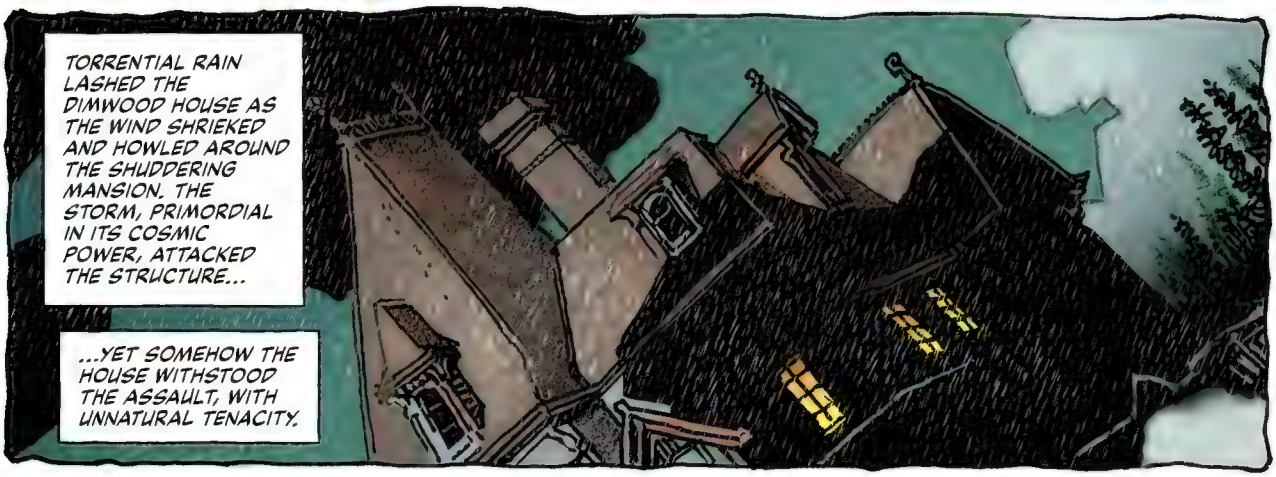
--HOUSE?
THAT IS A FUNGI THAT HAS TAKEN HOLD OF THE ANCIENT WOOD, ACCELERATING THE DECAY. FURBOL CAN'T SEEM TO GET RID OF IT...THERE'S SOMETHING LOATHSOME AND CREEPING ABOUT IT.
XERA, SWEETIE, WE'RE SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU!
YOU'VE REALLY GROWN, GIRL.
HASN'T SHE THOUGH! SUCH A LOVELY YOUNG LADY!
WE'RE STAYING OVER AT MABEL HENCHLE'S BOARDING HOUSE. WON'T YOU JOIN US THERE?
NO, HENNA. I'LL BE FINE HERE.
IF YOU'RE DETERMINED TO STAY, I'LL GET YOUR BAGS.
YES, I'M STAYING.
VERY WELL, DEAR. I'VE CLEANED YOUR ROOM A BIT, AND THERE'S SOME DINNER ON THE TABLE.
WE'LL BE BACK IN THE MORNING. WE'LL KEEP THINGS UP FOR YOU AS LONG AS YOU'RE HERE. BYE, NOW.

WONDERFUL! I HAVEN'T EATEN ALL DAY. SHALL WE?
WAIT A MINUTE-- SHE ONLY SET ONE PLACE. ODD FOR HENNA TO MAKE A MISTAKE!
I--WELL, I ATE EARLIER. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
MMMM! STEW. HENNA'S COOKING IS THE BEST. WON'T YOU HAVE SOME?
I THINK I'LL RETIRE. YOU PROBABLY WANT TO DO SOME UNPACKING AFTER SUPPER. I'LL BE IN MY ROOM.
WITH AN ANGRY GROWL OF THUNDER, THE STORM REVIVED AND BATTERED THE HOUSE WITH WILD, UNCANNY POWER.

XERA FELT MORBIDLY **ALONE** AND **SMALL** AS SHE CLIMBED INTO THE UPPER CAVERNS OF THE GLOOM-SHROUDED, DECAYING STRUCTURE.
I GUESS I KNOW WHERE EVERYTHING IS, BUT IT SEEMS UNFRIENDLY AND OMINOUS, SOMEHOW. I THINK NOAH'S MOOD HAS **INFECTED** ME.
WHAT IN THE WORLD? THE UPPER FLOORS ARE **BLOCKED** OFF.
JUST A **BREATH** OF A DRAFT CAUSES THE DOORS TO MOVE, SEEMINGLY OF THEIR OWN **VOLITION.**
LET'S SEE. THE BEDROOMS ARE THIS WAY?
OH!

A GIGANTIC, LEERING FIGURE WITH A PALPABLE, FOUL, CHARNEL **STENCH**...XERA STAGGERED BACK. SHE FACED HER HATED **STEPFATHER,** VIRGIL DIM, **GHASTLY** AND **DEMONIACAL,** STARING BACK AT HER.

NOOOH! DAMN YOU, YOU EVIL **BASTARD!** I HOPE YOU'RE BURNING IN THE HOTTEST PIT OF **HELL!**


TORRENTIAL RAIN LASHED THE DIMWOOD HOUSE AS THE WIND SHRIEKED AND HOWLED AROUND THE SHUDDERING MANSION. THE STORM, PRIMORDIAL IN ITS COSMIC POWER, ATTACKED THE STRUCTURE...
...YET SOMEHOW THE HOUSE WITHSTOOD THE ASSAULT, WITH UNNATURAL TENACITY.

SHE STIRRED SLIGHTLY FROM A COZY, WARM DREAM. AN INSISTENT RUSTLING DREW HER INTO A CHILLED, TENSE AWARENESS.
VOICES! HE MUST BE MAD AGAIN.
THEY'RE RIGHT OUTSIDE IN THE HALL. SHOULD I HIDE?
NOAH!
AAAH!
WHAK!

SILENTLY, THE DOOR OPENED-- SLOW AND DREAMLIKE. LITTLE XERA DRIFTED IRRESISTIBLY TO THE GAP.
YOU LITTLE FART! TRY TO STOP ME, WILL YOU? I'LL RIP YOUR HEAD OFF!
LEAVE HIM ALONE, YOU MONSTER! HE WAS JUST TRYING PROTECT ME!
EH--?
NO! STOP IT! THEY'RE JUST CHILDREN!
NO! PLEASE DON'T HURT NOAH, SIR.
WHAT, THE-- YOU REBELLIOUS LITTLE BRAT! I'LL GIVE YOU SOME OF HIS PUNISHMENT!
YOU BITCH!

BUK!
XERA, NOAH, RUN!
EEERGH!
GO TO THE RUCKER HOUSE. HAVE BELAH CALL THE SHERIFF!
I'LL KILL YOU!!
HE'LL CATCH US!
HURRY!
DON'T LET HIM HURT MOMMY!
AAARRGGH!! DON'T YOU RUN FROM ME! I'LL BEAT YOU TO A PUDDING!
XERA AND NOAH, COME BACK HERE. I'LL RIP YOUR ARMS AND LEGS OFF--

COME ON, XERA! WE HAVE TO DO WHAT SHE SAYS!
WE HAVE TO RUN *FAST!* HE WON'T GET US.
XERA, YOU GO BY THE CREEK PATH!
HA, HA, HA, HA!!
--AND *EAT* THEM! HA, HA, HA!
I'LL LEAD HIM INTO THE THICKET. IF YOU SEE HIM, HIDE!

PLEASE, DON'T LET HIM HURT MOMMY!
AAH!
A DARK, FEARSOME MASS SHAMBLED INTO HER PATH.
HRGH-GH-GH-GH!!
G-- GOT YU-- ERGH!!
IT WAS A NIGHTMARE TRAVESTY OF UNREAL QUIVERING FORM, GURGLING ITS GUTTURAL, CHUCKLING GROWLS.
I STOP YOU!
EEE-AAAGH!!
Y-YOUUU FFIIRRSSS--
NO! AH!
CRUNCH!
AAAACK!!

AAAAIIIEEHH!
THE YOUNG WOMAN WAS ALONE IN HER ROOM. THERE WAS NO MONSTER. LIGHTNING FLASHED AS THE RAIN BEAT AGAINST THE HOUSE AND WINDOWS.
BUT SHE FELT NO SAFETY OR ASSURANCE--RATHER A TENSE APPREHENSION.
I'M SURE I PACKED IT.
THERE!
SHE CREPT NERVOUSLY INTO THE STYGIAN HALL.
HIS ROOM WAS DOWN THIS WAY.

TAP TAP TAP
NOAH! NOAH, ARE YOU IN HERE? NOAH?
NOAH, I WANT TO TALK TO YOU.
WHERE ARE YOU?
KRAK-AK-AK-KRAK-BOOM!!

NOAH! THERE YOU ARE. BUT -- WHY ARE YOU JUST SITTING IN THE DARK?
HELLO, XERA. IN THE DARK, YOU SAY? I HADN'T NOTICED.
IT'S A--HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF LYGOPHILIA? SOMETIMES I JUST LIKE GO INTO A REVERIE AND DREAM.
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT? YOU'LL CATCH YOUR DEATH FROM THE RAIN BLOWING IN--
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT!
BEWARE FOR YOURSELF!
GASP!

A BRIGHT, CLEAR MORNING OPENED UP THE SKY. THE RAIN HAD CLEANED THE AIR AND ALL WAS CRISP AND EXHILARATING. A CACOPHONY OF CHATTERING AND SINGING BIRDS GAVE AN AIR OF HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING.
XERA'S STRANGE DREAMS OF THE NIGHT WERE EASILY DISMISSED.
OH MY GOD! IS THAT COFFEE AND HAM I SMELL COOKING?
OH, HENNA, I THOUGHT I HAD GONE TO HEAVEN WHEN I SMELLED YOUR BREAKFAST.
THANK YOU, DEAR. I HOPE YOU LIKE IT. IT WILL BE JUST LIKE OLD TIMES. I REMEMBER YOU LIKED YOUR EGGS FIRM-COOKED.
THIS IS WONDERFUL!
BUT HENNA, YOU DIDN'T SET A PLACE FOR NOAH.
WHY, XERA, WHATEVER MADE YOU SAY SUCH A THING?

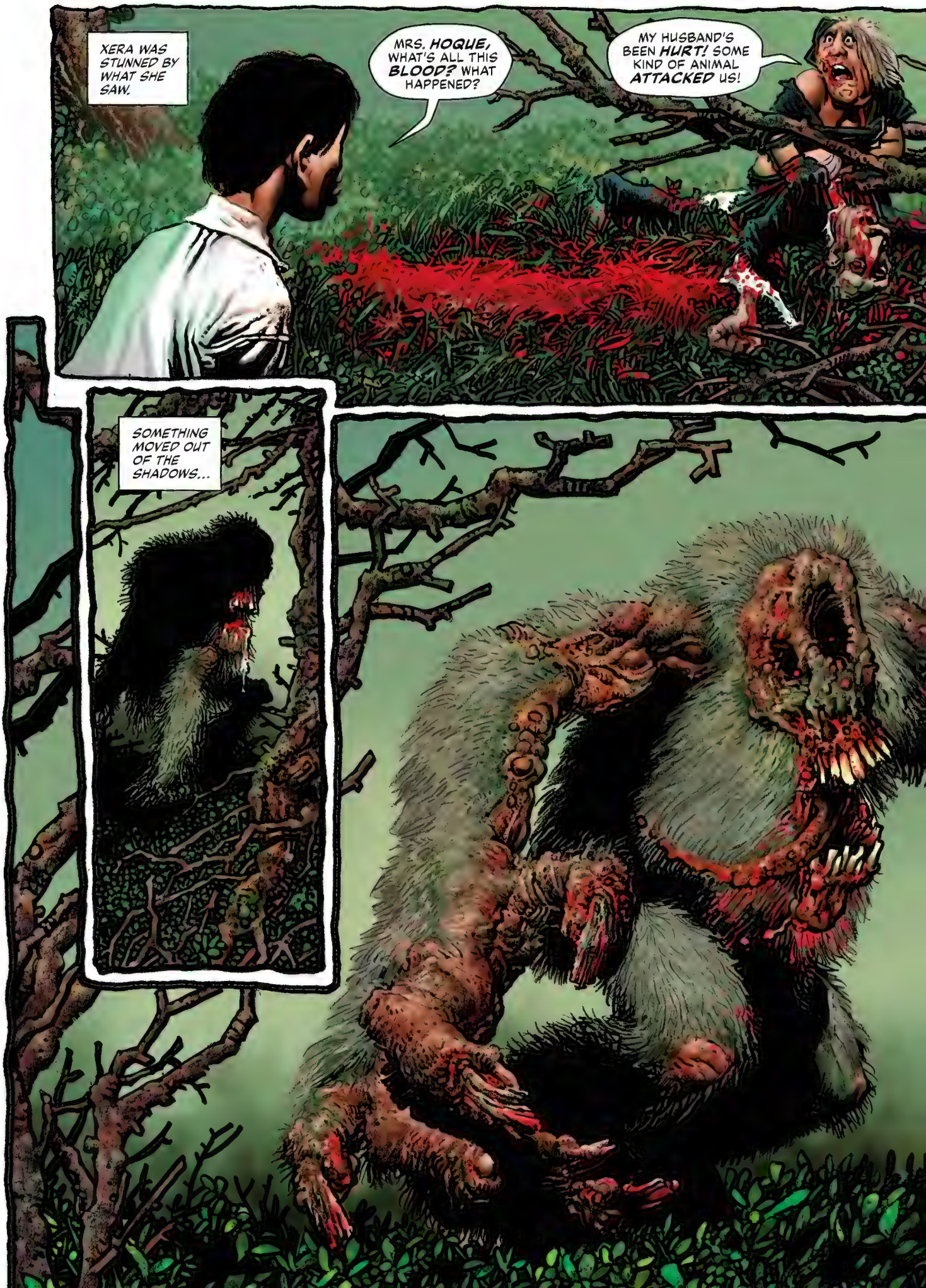
DIDN'T YOUR MOTHER WRITE TO YOU ABOUT NOAH?
NO. COME SIT WITH ME, AND TELL ME--WHAT HAPPENED?
OH, DEAR, I'M SO SORRY TO HAVE TO TELL YOU THIS.
NOAH DISAPPEARED JUST MONTHS AFTER THEY TOOK YOU AWAY. WITH THE WAY THINGS WERE, WE ALL THOUGHT HE JUST RAN AWAY.
OR HE GOT LOST IN THE WOODS.
WE HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR FIFTEEN YEARS.
THERE HASN'T BEEN A TRACE.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? DIDN'T YOU SEE HIM AT THE GRAVEYARD WITH ME?
THIS MAKES NO SENSE. I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

I SAW MY BROTHER HERE YESTERDAY! AND LAST NIGHT, TOO! HE'S PROBABLY STILL IN HIS ROOM.
NOAH!
WHAT ON EARTH HAS GOTTEN INTO THAT CHILD?
NOAH!
I'VE GOT TO CLEAR MY HEAD.
I'M GOING FOR A WALK, HENNA.
OH, DEAR, PLEASE DON'T WALK IN THE WOODS! CAN'T I GET SOMETHING FOR YOU, XERA?

THERE'S FURBOL, CHOPPING WOOD. I'LL TALK TO HIM.
GOOD MORNING, XERA. IT'S CERTAINLY A BEAUTIFUL DAY TODAY.
HELLO, FURBOL. YES, IT'S LOVELY, ISN'T IT?
OH, MY! I DIDN'T REMEMBER WHAT A HUNK YOU ARE. I'LL BET YOU HAVE A DOZEN GIRLFRIENDS.
NO, SWEETIE. I'M STILL WAITING FOR YOU.
FURBOL, HENNA JUST SAID THE STRANGEST THING. UH--AH--DID YOU SEE ANYONE WITH ME YESTERDAY?
NO, NO ONE WAS WITH YOU. JUST US--OH, YOU MEAN THE LITTLE GIRL.
NOT THE LITTLE GIRL. NOAH WAS WITH ME. DIDN'T YOU SEE HIM?
I SAW YOU AND THE LITTLE GIRL. NO ONE ELSE, BUT THE PEOPLE AT THE FUNERAL.

WOULD YOU THINK I'VE LOST MY MIND IF I SAID I MET WITH NOAH YESTERDAY?
THIS IS SO STRANGE. NONE OF THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR. THINGS GET OVERGROWN SO QUICKLY HERE.
AND I HAVE THAT CREEPY FEELING OF BEING WATCHED AGAIN, LIKE I DID YESTERDAY.
WHAT'S THAT? BLOOD ON THE TREE?
EEEE

I'M GOING FOR A WALK. I WANT TO VISIT SOME OF THE PLACES WHERE I USED TO PLAY.
XERA, YOU SHOULDN'T WALK IN THE WOODS THESE DAYS.
DON'T WORRY--I WON'T GO FAR--AND I'M ARMED.
EEEEE
AAH! IT'S THAT LITTLE GIRL, KAREN.
HELP! PLEASE HELP ME!


XERA WAS STUNNED BY WHAT SHE SAW.
MRS. HOQUE, WHAT'S ALL THIS BLOOD? WHAT HAPPENED?
MY HUSBAND'S BEEN HURT! SOME KIND OF ANIMAL ATTACKED US!
SOMETHING MOVED OUT OF THE SHADOWS...

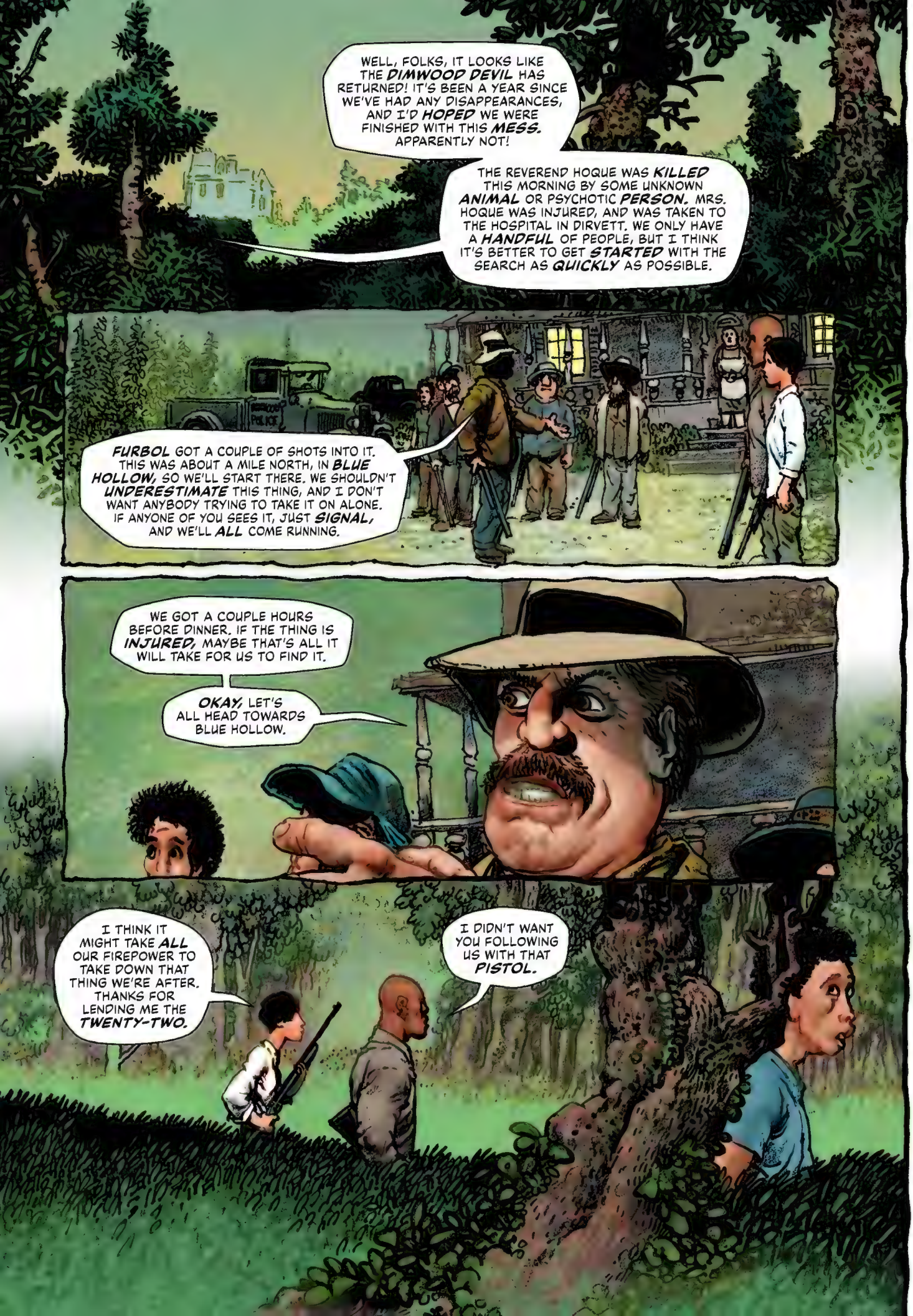
I CAN'T MOVE HIM. HE WON'T WAKE UP. HELP ME!
I THINK HE'S DEAD!
NOO!!!
GRRRRR!
STAGGERING FORWARD AWKWARDLY,
CAME THE HORRID CREATURE OF XERA'S NIGHTMARES,
GROWLING WITH HIDEOUS INTENT.
XERA DIDN'T HESITATE--SHE FIRED FOUR .32 CALIBER BULLETS INTO THE BEAST.
BAM!
BAM!
BAM!
BAM!

XERA HAD JUST PUT FOUR BULLETS INTO THE MONSTER, BUT IT WAS WEIRDLY **UNAFFECTED** BY THE SHOTS. THE UNCANNY BEAST WAS INTENT ON THE BLOODY BODY SPRAWLED IN THE GRASS.
IT HORRIFICALLY **TWISTED** THE REVEREND'S HEAD AND BIT DEEPLY INTO THE **SKULL, SPRAYING** BRAIN TISSUE IN A FOUNTAIN OF **GORE.**

XERA TRIED TO PULL THE HYSTERICAL WOMAN AWAY FROM THE VIOLENT SCENE, BUT SHE RASHLY CHARGED FORWARD.
NO! LEAVE HIM ALONE! FIEND FROM HELL!
GET BACK, MRS. HOQUE!
ENRAGED, SHE THREW HERSELF AT THE MONSTER, BATTERING AT THE MASSIVE FORM.
I'M OUT OF BULLETS!

PULL HARD, MAMIE! HARDER!!
KICK AT IT! WE'RE ALMOST LOOSE!
BLAM!
SOMETHING SLAMMED INTO THE BEAST, AND IT REELED IN SHOCK.
ITS BLOOD SPATTERED THE GRASS AS IT QUIVERED WITH UNFAMILIAR PAIN.

THERE! COME ON!
A COUGHING GIGGLE GURGLED FROM THE ABOMINATION'S TWISTED THROAT AS IT ROSE AND CRAWLED TOWARD THE WOMEN.
BLAM!
WHAT? WHAT HAPPENED?
XERA! MRS. HOQUE! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
FURBOL!


WELL, FOLKS, IT LOOKS LIKE THE DIMWOOD DEVIL HAS RETURNED! IT'S BEEN A YEAR SINCE WE'VE HAD ANY DISAPPEARANCES, AND I'D HOPED WE WERE FINISHED WITH THIS MESS. APPARENTLY NOT!
THE REVEREND HOQUE WAS KILLED THIS MORNING BY SOME UNKNOWN ANIMAL OR PSYCHOTIC PERSON. MRS. HOQUE WAS INJURED, AND WAS TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL IN DIRVETT. WE ONLY HAVE A HANDFUL OF PEOPLE, BUT I THINK IT'S BETTER TO GET STARTED WITH THE SEARCH AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.
FURBOL GOT A COUPLE OF SHOTS INTO IT. THIS WAS ABOUT A MILE NORTH, IN BLUE HOLLOW, SO WE'LL START THERE. WE SHOULDN'T UNDERESTIMATE THIS THING, AND I DON'T WANT ANYBODY TRYING TO TAKE IT ON ALONE. IF ANYONE OF YOU SEES IT, JUST SIGNAL, AND WE'LL ALL COME RUNNING.
WE GOT A COUPLE HOURS BEFORE DINNER. IF THE THING IS INJURED, MAYBE THAT'S ALL IT WILL TAKE FOR US TO FIND IT.
OKAY, LET'S ALL HEAD TOWARDS BLUE HOLLOW.
I THINK IT MIGHT TAKE ALL OUR FIREPOWER TO TAKE DOWN THAT THING WE'RE AFTER. THANKS FOR LENDING ME THE TWENTY-TWO.
I DIDN'T WANT YOU FOLLOWING US WITH THAT PISTOL.

FURBOL, YOU'VE GOT SOME STRANGE SCARS AROUND YOUR NECK. THOSE WEREN'T THERE WHEN I LEFT. WHAT HAPPENED?
IT'S NOT A VERY NICE STORY, SWEETHEART. MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST SKIP IT.
FURBOL, I REALLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU.
OKAY, OKAY, XERA. THOSE WERE SOME BAD TIMES. VERY BAD.
FIVE PEOPLE DISAPPEARED IN THESE WOODS. SOME PEOPLE JUMPED TO THE CONCLUSION THAT I DID IT.
THEY TRIED TO KILL ME.
OH, MY GOD, FURBOL!
YOUR MOTHER, MRS. DIM, AND YOUR BROTHER NOAH CUT ME DOWN AND TOOK CARE OF ME. I'M FINE NOW.
BUT--WHAT ABOUT THE MOB THAT DID IT?
I'M OKAY, XERA. IT'S OVER NOW.
FURBOL, THAT'S HORRIBLE! I DON'T UNDERSTAND--HOW CAN YOU FORGIVE IT?
YOU'RE RIGHT, DEAR. I WAS ANGRY. MADDER THAN HELL! BUT IT'S THE STRANGEST THING--THOSE FOUR DRUNKEN ASSHOLES THAT STRUNG ME UP, WELL... THEY DISAPPEARED, TOO. SO I'M NOT MAD ANYMORE.

THOSE CREEPS GOT WHAT THEY DESERVED!
FURBOL WAS JUST HERE! WHICH WAY DID HE GO?
WHAT'S THAT?
UGH! DID I SEE IT BEFORE?
NOAH!
HELLO, XERA. IT'S ME, AGAIN.

NOAH, WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON WITH YOU?
HENNA AND FURBOL SAID YOU WERE MISSING--OR DEAD.
YOU'RE ACTING SO STRANGELY--
I DON'T ALWAYS GET ALONG WITH HENNA AND FURBOL THESE DAYS, SO I JUST AVOID THEIR COMPANY.
BUT NOAH, WE'VE ALWAYS LOVED HENNA AND FURBOL. THEY'RE FAMILY. WHAT'S THE MATTER?
I GUESS I JUST WANT TO BE ALONE.
BUT IF YOU NEED ME, I'LL BE THERE.
BUT WHY ARE YOU WANDERING ALONE IN THESE DANGEROUS WOODS?
I FOUND YOUR NEW LITTLE FRIEND OUT HERE. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO KNOW.
KAREN!

ONCE AGAIN, XERA FOUND LITTLE KAREN ALONE AND AFRAID IN THE FOREST, WHERE THE HORRIFYING "DIMWOOD DEVIL" PROWLED AND MURDERED. XERA'S HEART WAS FILLED WITH SYMPATHY FOR THE LOST CHILD.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DON'T FRET, DEAR. WE'LL TAKE YOU TO SAFETY.
YES, WE'LL FIND YOUR MOMMA. WAS SHE WITH YOU?
I THINK WE'RE IN DANGER HERE. THIS CLEARING DOESN'T FEEL SAFE.
KAREN, WE SHOULD TAKE YOU TO A SAFE PLACE. THEN MY BROTHER AND I CAN SEARCH FOR YOUR MOTHER.
FURBOL ISN'T TOO FAR AWAY. HE CAN HELP US.

MY MOMMA IS LOST. CAN YOU HELP ME FIND HER?
BUT WE GOT TO SAVE MOMMA FIRST! THERE'S A MONSTER. I HID FROM IT.
A WISE TACTIC. ONE WE SHOULD ALL FOLLOW.
THERE!
MY MOMMA!

KAREN SIGHTED A TORN, FLUTTERING RAG SMEARED WITH BLOOD. SHE SEEMED TO RECOGNIZE IT AS HER MOTHER'S.
MOMMA!
NO, KAREN! STOP!
MY MOMMA WENT DOWN THE HOLE TO HIDE!
WHAT IN HELL--?!
AAAAHH!
GGHHRRR!

IT'S A LITTLE MONSTER! IT WILL GET MOMMA!
SSGGHRRR!
HISSING DEFIANTLY, THE MUTANT RAT DISAPPEARED INTO THE TUNNEL.
MOMMA!
DON'T GO INTO THAT HOLE, KAREN!
SHE WENT DOWN THIS WAY! WE HAVE TO SAVE HER.
NO! KAREN! KAREN!

COME BACK UP HERE! DAMN IT!
NOAH, COME AND HELP!
WHERE DID HE GO?
I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO FOLLOW HER DOWN.
POW!
XERA'S SIGNAL SHOT ECHOED THROUGH THE TREES.
FURBOL WILL HEAR AND FOLLOW.
HOW FAR DOWN IS THE BOTTOM OF THIS PIT?
WELL, NOT TOO DEEP.
BUT VERY DARK!

IT'S A TUNNEL THAT PROCEEDS--
--WHERE?
I'M GLAD I BROUGHT THIS LITTLE FLASHLIGHT.
KAREN PROBABLY WENT THIS WAY.
JEESHH!! THAT'S THE BIGGEST CENTIPEDE I'VE EVER SEEN.
THIS MUST HAVE BEEN DUG THROUGH HERE TO MAKE A SECRET PASSAGE BY SOME PERSON--
--OR THING.

KAREN! ARE YOU DOWN HERE?
WHAT'S THIS? WOOD? ROTTING WOODEN BOXES BURIED IN THE EARTH. THEY'RE ALL AROUND ME.
THIS IS NIGHTMARISH! I MUST BE BELOW THE DIMWOOD GRAVEYARD, AND THE COFFINS ARE EXPOSED.
UGH! ROTTING HUMAN BODIES! THESE HAVE BEEN CHEWED! NAUSEATING!
WHAT INHUMAN GHOUL BUILT THIS MAZE OF DECAYED FLESH AND BONES?

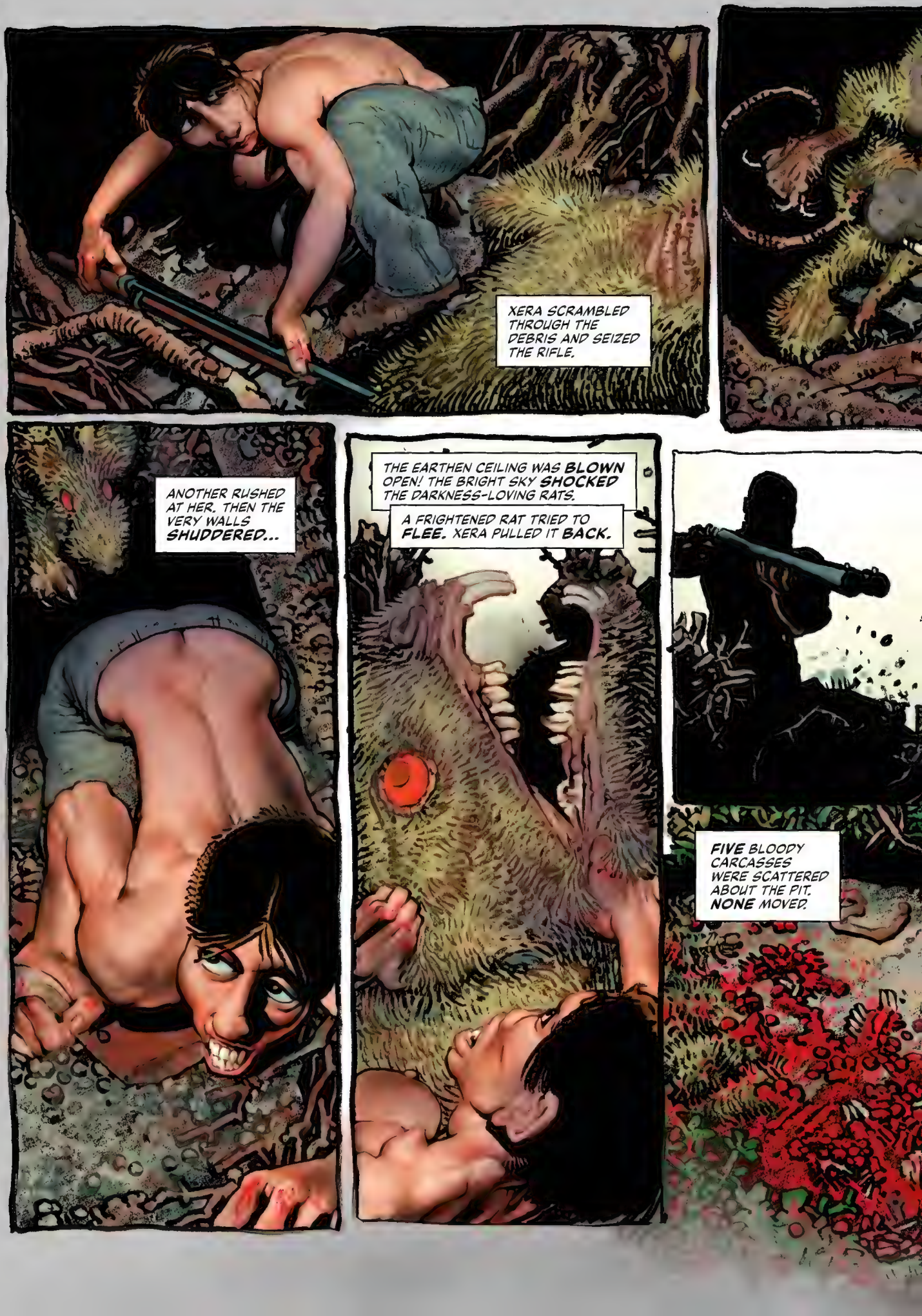
AAAAAAHH!
A HAND!!
OH, GOD! THE ODOR IS GETTING STRONGER. I'M GOING TO BE SICK!
I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

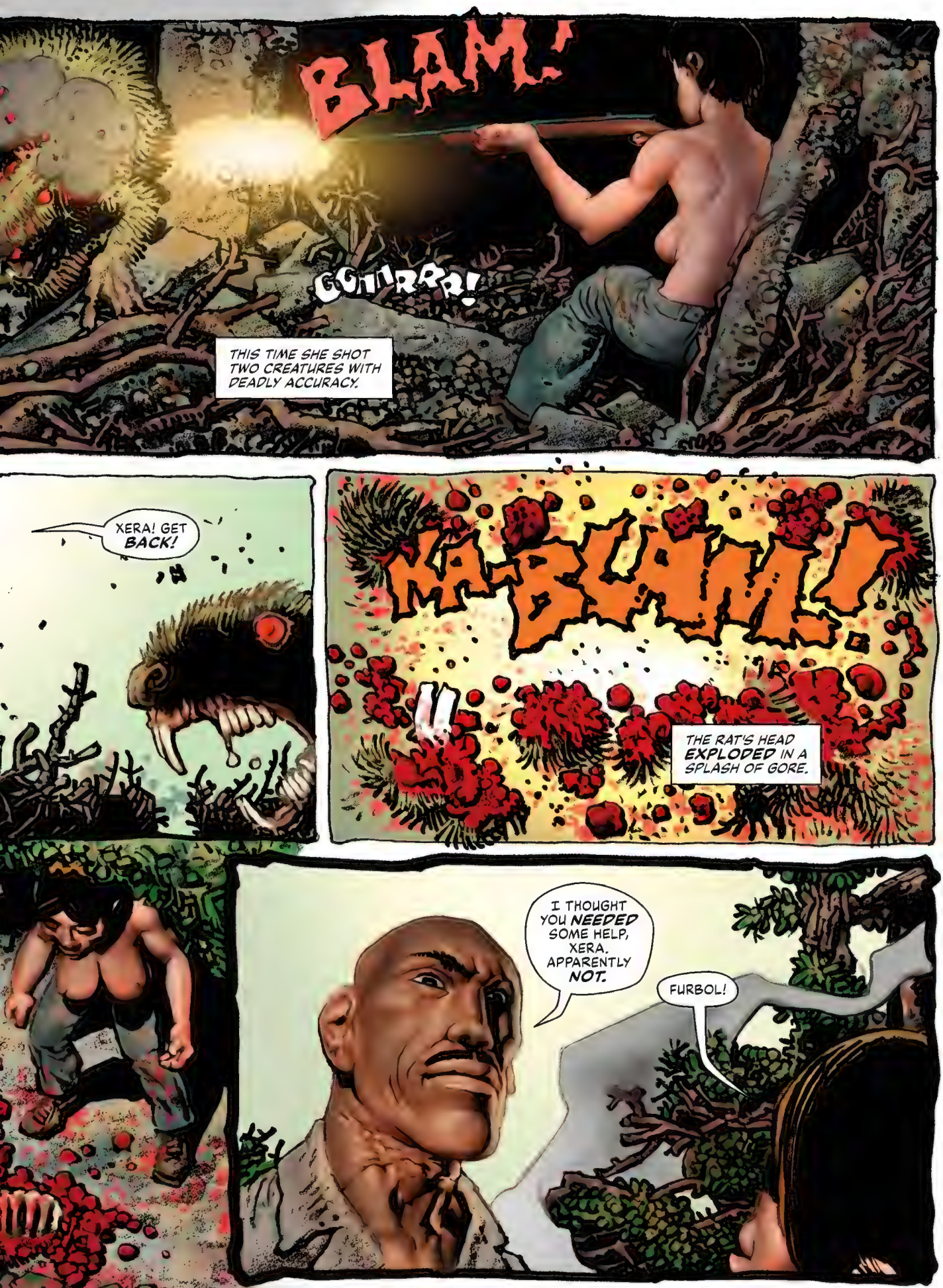
A LANKY FIGURE APPROACHED AND PAUSED AT THE GAPING BLACK CAVITY IN THE EARTH. HE ASSESSED THE SCENE CAREFULLY.
IT LOOKS LIKE SHE WENT DOWN INTO THIS DAMNED PIT.
WHY'D SHE HAVE TO GO AND DO THAT? I WISH SHE HADN'T.
BUT SHE DID.
DAMN IT.

"THAT PIT MIGHT GO ON FOR MILES. SOME KIDS JUST DON'T HAVE ANY SENSE."
GOD! I'M GLAD TO BE AWAY FROM THAT GRAVEYARD SECTION OF THIS TRAIL. BUT STILL NO SIGN OF KAREN.
AT LEAST THERE'S NO BLOOD.
IT SEEMS TO BE LEADING BACK TOWARD THE HOUSE.
XERA CALLED FOR KAREN, BUT HER SHOUTS WERE MUFFLED BY THE HEAVY SOIL AND DENSE LATTICE OF ROOTS.
KAREN! IF YOU CAN HEAR ME, PLEASE ANSWER!
WAIT! WAS THAT SOMETHING?
BRICKS AND STONE! A STRUCTURE! I KNEW IT!

LOOKS LIKE THE CRUMBLING REMAINS OF SOME EARLIER SUBCELLAR. UGH, THERE'S A MUSTY, NASTY ODOR DOWN HERE. AND A SCURRYING NOISE...
SSNKKRRRAUGHH!!
IN THE FLASHLIGHT'S DIM GLOW, SHE SAW MORE BURNING EYES.
BLAM!
THE VICIOUS THINGS RUSHED AT HER BEFORE SHE COULD AIM.
SSNKUURRGH!!

BLAM!
XERA FIRED WILDLY, BLINDLY, BUT AT SUCH CLOSE RANGE, SHE COULDN'T MISS. THE FOUL CREATURE FELL DEAD INSTANTLY.
THE RIFLE WAS KNOCKED OUT OF HER GRASP. SHE DESPERATELY SEIZED A BRICK FRAGMENT IN THE DARK--
KRAK!
--AND SMASHED A RAT'S HEAD, WHILE ANOTHER TORE AT HER.


XERA SCRAMBLED THROUGH THE DEBRIS AND SEIZED THE RIFLE.
ANOTHER RUSHED AT HER. THEN THE VERY WALLS **SHUDDERED...**
THE EARTHEN CEILING WAS **BLOWN** OPEN! THE BRIGHT SKY **SHOCKED** THE DARKNESS-LOVING RATS.
A FRIGHTENED RAT TRIED TO **FLEE.** XERA PULLED IT **BACK.**
FIVE BLOODY CARCASSES WERE SCATTERED ABOUT THE PIT. **NONE** MOVED.


BLAM!
GNNRRR!
THIS TIME SHE SHOT TWO CREATURES WITH DEADLY ACCURACY.
XERA! GET BACK!
KA-BLAM!
THE RAT'S HEAD EXPLODED IN A SPLASH OF GORE.
I THOUGHT YOU NEEDED SOME HELP, XERA. APPARENTLY NOT.
FURBOL!

SO, YOUNG LADY, WHY DID YOU WANT TO GO INTO THIS BLACK TUNNEL?
THE LITTLE GIRL, KAREN, CLIMBED INTO IT. SHE WOULDN'T COME OUT.
I FOLLOWED HER ALL THE WAY HERE. LOOK! THE PASSAGE GOES UNDER THE HOUSE.
WAIT A MINUTE, XERA.
WAIT FOR WHAT? LET'S GO! WE SHOULD HURRY!
HERE! YOU SHOULD PUT THIS ON.
WHAT?
OH--!

COME ON! WE'VE GOT TO FIND HER. SHE'S STILL IN GREAT DANGER.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YES! WELL, AT LEAST I'M STILL WEARING MY PANTS.
OKAY, LET'S GO.

XERA AND FURBOL CAREFULLY MADE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE STYGIAN PASSAGES THAT WOUND UNDER THE BROODING MANSION, LOOKING ALL AROUND THEM FOR THE VULNERABLE LITTLE GIRL.
THESE TUNNELS WINDING UNDER THE FOUNDATIONS OF DIMWOOD... THEY'RE ***INCREDIBLE.*** I HAD NO IDEA THEY EXISTED HERE.
I'VE WORKED FOR THE DIM FAMILY FOR THIRTY YEARS, AND I DIDN'T KNOW, ***EITHER.***
BUT--***WHO*** BUILT IT, AND ***WHY?***
I'M THINKING YOUR STEPFATHER DID. HE WENT COMPLETELY ***INSANE*** LONG BEFORE WE REALIZED.
KAREN MUST BE IN HERE ***SOMEWHERE.*** I HOPE HE ***ISN'T,*** THOUGH.

WHAT IS THAT STUFF?
THESE ARE THE MUSHROOMS HE WAS OBSESSED WITH. WE THOUGHT HE MUST BE CULTIVATING THEM IN SOME HIDING PLACE. THEY'RE GROWING WILD DOWN HERE, NOW.
I HEAR SOMETHING. OVER THERE.
FROM THAT CASE.
OH, MY GOD! DID HE STUFF HER IN THERE?

THE BOLT IS STUCK!
GOT IT!
WAAAHH!
KAREN!
WAAHH!
THERE, THERE, SWEETIE. YOU'RE SAFE NOW.
WE SHOULD GET MOVING. HE COULD STILL BE NEARBY.
I HOPE WE CAN FIND OUR WAY OUT WITHOUT GOING BACK THE WAY WE CAME. I THINK KAREN'S STILL PRETTY SCARED; SHE'S SHAKING.
I THINK I HAVE SOME IDEA OF WHERE WE ARE UNDER THE HOUSE. LET'S GO.

FURBOL, WOULD YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT MOTHER AND VIRGIL DIM? I HAVE A LOT OF HOLES IN MY MEMORY, AND ONLY A FUZZY IDEA OF WHAT HAPPENED TO US.
YOUR FAMILY'S STORY IS SAD AND STRANGE.
"YOUR MOTHER WAS A WIDOW WHEN YOU AND NOAH WERE JUST BABIES. SHE WAS LEFT WEALTHY. WHEN SHE MARRIED VIRGIL DIM, WE ALL THOUGHT IT WAS A GOOD MATCH.
"HE SEEMED TO GENUINELY CARE ABOUT YOU KIDS. THIS WAS A HAPPY PLACE FOR A FEW YEARS.

"HE WAS AN INTELLECTUAL, AND WAS ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN NATURAL SCIENCE.
"VIRGIL AND MILDRED WERE DEVOTED TO EACH OTHER...
"...AND HE WAS A KIND FATHER. YOU AND NOAH LOVED HIM.
"HE CONTINUED HIS STUDIES--
"--IN BIOLOGY--
"--ESPECIALLY IN FUNGI AND MUSHROOMS.

"AS A MYCOLOGIST, HE WAS THRILLED TO DISCOVER AN UNKNOWN SPECIES, WHICH HE DOCUMENTED EXTENSIVELY.
"ONE DAY, HE OBSERVED A FERAL PIG ROOTING IN THE NEW FUNGUS.
"IT SEEMED TO EAGERLY DEVOUR ALL IT COULD FIND.
"THEN IT RAN INTO THE FOREST, CAREENING WILDLY.
"VIRGIL COLLECTED SOME OF THE MUSHROOMS--
"--TO EXPERIMENT WITH EATING SOME HIMSELF.

"AT FIRST, VIRGIL BECAME ILL.
"THEN HE WAS OVERTAKEN BY A STRANGE, DISTURBING MOOD.
"HE STARTED JIBBERING, SLOBBERING, AND TEARING AT HIS CLOTHES.
"WE WERE APPALLED TO SEE THE KIND, INTELLIGENT MAN WE KNEW REGRESS INTO A DEPRAVED MANIAC.
"MRS. DIM, IN ANGUISH, BEGGED ME TO GO AFTER HER DEMENTED HUSBAND.
"AS I PURSUED HIM, I SUDDENLY CAME UPON--

"HE RAN INTO THE WOODS, NAKED AND SCREAMING, WHILE WE WATCHED IN SHOCKED HORROR.
"THE VIOLENT TURMOIL OF HIS MIND MUST HAVE BEEN TORTUOUS...
"--A BLOODY, DESTROYED BODY.
"I DID NOT KNOW IT WOULD BE THE FIRST OF MANY."

XERA AT LAST BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THAT A MYSTERIOUS ADDICTION CAUSED HER STEPFATHER'S DEMENTED BEHAVIOR, AND THAT A DEAD BODY HAD BEEN FOUND CONCURRENTLY. FURBOL AND HENNA CONTINUED THE FASCINATING TALE...
THEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE RETURNED. HE SEEMED NORMAL AGAIN.
THERE WAS NO PROOF THAT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY CRIME. HE WAS GENUINELY REMORSEFUL FOR ALARMING US WITH HIS WEIRD BEHAVIOR. WE HOPED HIS MADNESS WAS OVER.
MISTRESS MILDRED INSISTED ON GIVING HIM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. SO WE TOOK UP OUR LIVES AS BEFORE.
THERE'S MORE TO TELL FURBOL, BUT LET'S RETIRE TO THE LIBRARY FOR TEA BEFORE WE CONTINUE.
OUTWARDLY, ALL WAS FINE. HE RESUMED HIS STUDIES.
"EVERYTHING WAS GOOD AGAIN. HE WAS A LOVING FATHER ONCE MORE. HE SPENT MUCH TIME PLAYING WITH YOU AND NOAH, AS THOUGH HE WAS TRYING TO REGAIN YOUR TRUST AND LOVE.

LET ME HELP YOU, HENNA.
SO HE REJOINED THE FAMILY AGAIN, AND YET THERE WAS SOMETHING INDEFINABLE ABOUT HIS ATTITUDE, A DIFFERENCE THAT I COULDN'T PUT MY FINGER ON.
"THEN THE ADDICTIVE FUNGUS TOOK CONTROL AS BEFORE.
"BUT IT WAS WORSE THIS TIME."

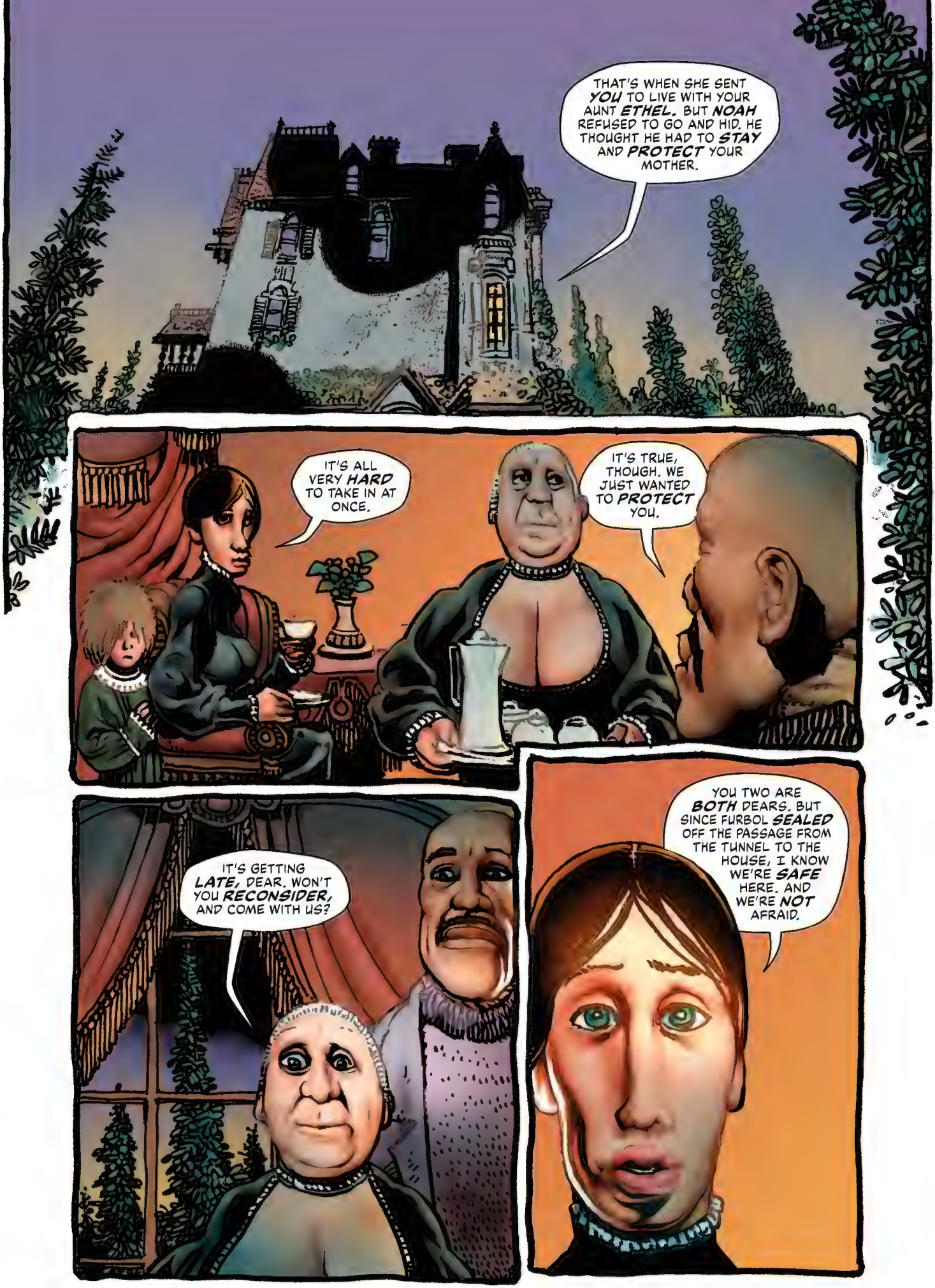
YOU LITTLE BASTARD!!
"IF YOU OR NOAH DARED TO DISTURB HIM, HE WAS SUDDENLY A MADMAN.
"HE WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU BOTH."
AAARRGGH! I'LL TEACH YOU TO GET IN MY WAY!
MR. DIM, YOU MUST CONTROL YOURSELF!
"I HAD TO STOP HIM. HE FOUGHT LIKE A DEMON."
STOP, HELL! I'LL GIVE YOU SOME!!
HHAAAUGH!
UNGH!

"HE HOWLED IN DEFIANCE.
"I HIT HIM WITH A PIPE.
"HE FLED INTO THE FOREST, CURSING.
"THERE WAS NO SIGN OF HIM FOR A COUPLE YEARS. YET WE KNEW HE WAS STILL PROWLING THE DENSE WOODS.
"THE REPORTS OF DISAPPEARANCES AND MYSTERIOUS DEATHS WERE OMINOUS.
"THEN ONE EVENING HE SHAMBLED INTO VIEW, SWEARING INCOHERENTLY.
"THE TRANSFORMATION WAS HORRIFIC. MR. DIM WAS NOW A MONSTER."
GRAAUUGH-G-G-GH!!
WOMAN, YOU MUST HIDE ME. THE SHERIFF IS CLOSE BEHIND!

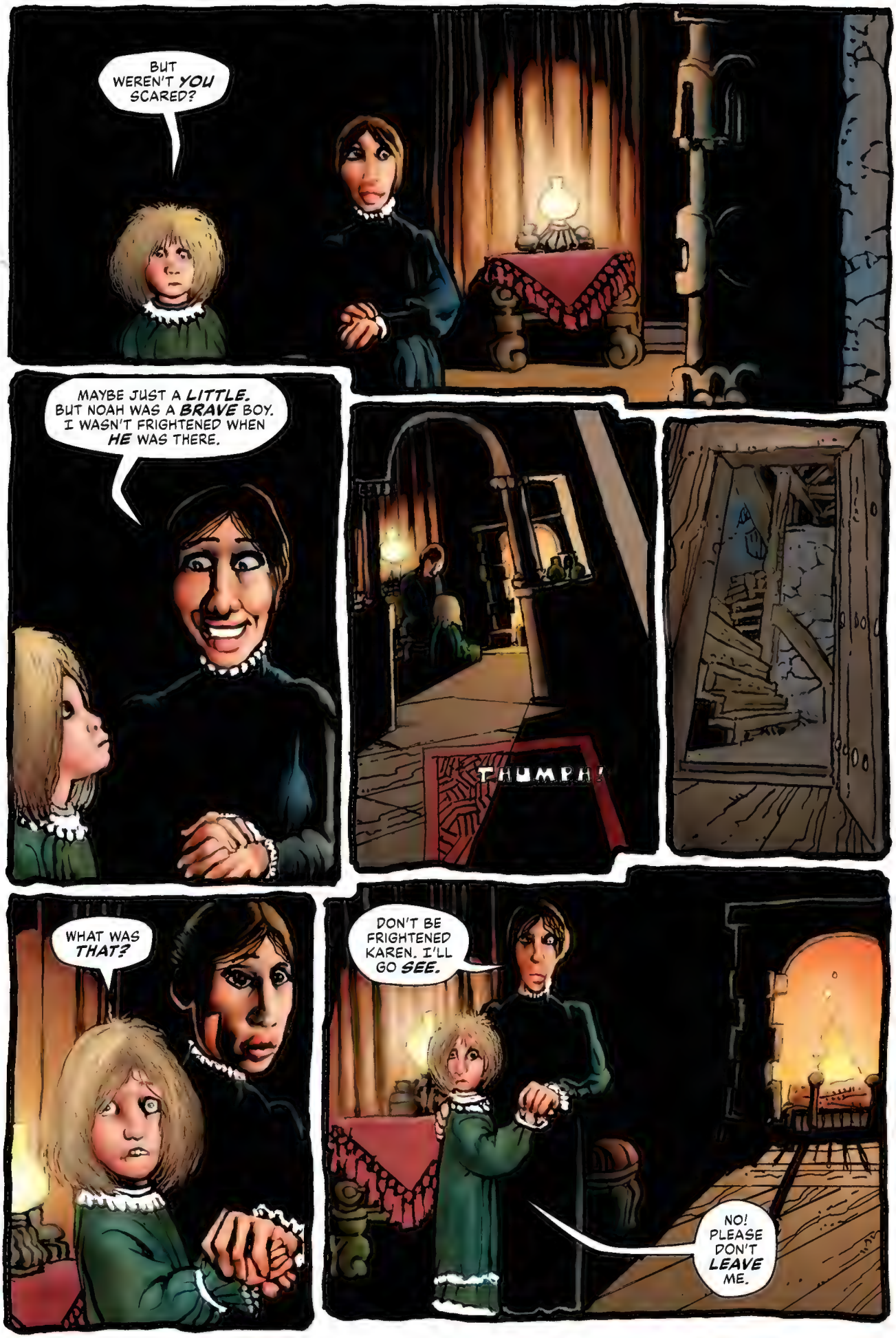
NO! GO AWAY OR I'LL SHOOT!
AAUURRGHH-GH! JUST AS I THOUGHT, YOU UNGRATEFUL BITCH. MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO SEE ME EAT YOUR PRECIOUS CHILDREN!!
H-H-HA-HA-HAUGH!
NO! PLEASE DON'T HURT THEM.
BEEP BEEP
WAIT UNTIL THEY'RE OUT OF SIGHT.
OH, MRS. DIM. THIS IS AWFUL!
COME ON, HENNA! I THINK HE'S HIDDEN IN THE HOUSE. HE'S GOT XERA AND NOAH!

I COULD GO FOR A LITTLE BITE RIGHT NOW!
MRS. DIM, THAT FIEND WAS SEEN NEAR HERE. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
LISTEN! IT'S KILLED TWO MORE PEOPLE--THE HAYWOOD TEENAGERS! HAVE YOU SEEN HIM?
NO! NOT HERE! WE'RE ALL RIGHT, SHERIFF. WE'LL KEEP A CLOSE WATCH. DON'T WORRY ABOUT US. I HOPE YOU CATCH HIM!
OH MY GOD! IT'S FURBOL. IS HE DEAD?

HE'S BREATHING. I THINK HE GOT KNOCKED OUT.
HE MUST HAVE TRIED TO FIGHT THE MONSTER.
HURRY! WE CAN'T WAIT!
IT HAS TAKEN THEM INTO THE ATTIC.
OH, PLEASE, PLEASE!!!
THERE THEY ARE!
IT'S JUST NOT SAFE HERE FOR THEM ANYMORE! I'LL HAVE TO SEND THEM BOTH AWAY!


THAT'S WHEN SHE SENT YOU TO LIVE WITH YOUR AUNT ETHEL. BUT NOAH REFUSED TO GO AND HID. HE THOUGHT HE HAD TO STAY AND PROTECT YOUR MOTHER.
IT'S ALL VERY HARD TO TAKE IN AT ONCE.
IT'S TRUE, THOUGH. WE JUST WANTED TO PROTECT YOU.
IT'S GETTING LATE, DEAR. WON'T YOU RECONSIDER, AND COME WITH US?
YOU TWO ARE BOTH DEARS. BUT SINCE FURBOL SEALED OFF THE PASSAGE FROM THE TUNNEL TO THE HOUSE, I KNOW WE'RE SAFE HERE. AND WE'RE NOT AFRAID.

I WISH SHE WOULDN'T STAY THERE.
SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN AN OBSTINATE CHILD.
WELL, SHE'S A GROWN WOMAN, NOW.
WE CAN'T TELL HER WHAT TO DO.
THE WOODS ARE DARK AND SCARY.
WHEN WE WERE YOUR AGE, MY BROTHER AND I PLAYED IN THE WOODS. TO US, IT WAS A WONDERFUL AND MYSTERIOUS PLAYGROUND.


BUT WEREN'T YOU SCARED?
MAYBE JUST A LITTLE. BUT NOAH WAS A BRAVE BOY. I WASN'T FRIGHTENED WHEN HE WAS THERE.
THUMPH!
WHAT WAS THAT?
DON'T BE FRIGHTENED KAREN. I'LL GO SEE.
NO! PLEASE DON'T LEAVE ME.

THE DARK, CAVERNOUS HOUSE AND OBSCURING WOODS SEEMED INCREASINGLY SINISTER AS BLACK SHADOWS CRAWLED UP THE ANCIENT WALLS.
OKAY. STAY BEHIND ME.
A GROWLING RUMBLE PREAMBLED A TEMPESTUOUS NIGHT.
OH, IT'S JUST AN URN ON A TALL CABINET.
THUMPH

K-K-K RAK B-BOOM
NOAH!
WAH!
THERE'S THAT SOUND AGAIN.
IT CAME FROM THIS WAY.
THUMP!
NO. THIS WAY.
WAAAAH!

DON'T CRY KAREN, HONEY. IT'S JUST THUNDER.
I HOPE IT STOPS.
I THINK IT WILL SOON.
SEE? IT'S GONE NOW.
WHAT IS THAT?
THAT'S THE STAIRWAY TO THE UPPER FLOORS, BUT IT'S BOARDED OVER NOW.
C-C-C-CREEAK!!!

THERE IT IS AGAIN! LET'S HIDE.
THUMPH!
THUMPH!
I'M SURE IT'S JUST A TREE LIMB HITTING THE HOUSE.
THUMPH!
MAKE IT STOP!
IT'S QUIET AGAIN.
IS THAT SMOKE?
I HOPE NOT. IT MUST JUST BE A THICK MIST CREATED BECAUSE THE ATTIC IS COLD.

IT DOESN'T SEEM SO COLD TO ME NOW.
S- S. S. S- X- X. E- E- RKAA.
MOTHER?

YOU MUST LEAVE!
IT SEARCHES FOR YOU. YOU ABOVE ALL OTHERS.
LISTEN TO ME, XEKA. YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!
BUT WHAT--? WHAT SEARCHES FOR ME, MOTHER?
IT IS VERY NEAR.
IT CRAVES YOUR FLESH!

PLEASE, MOTHER. TELL ME HOW YOU DIED. DID THAT MONSTER--
YES, XERA. I WILL TELL YOU, SO YOU WILL UNDERSTAND, AND LEAVE DIMWOOD FOREVER, AS I BID YOU. I WANT YOU TO BE SAFE.
THE THING THAT WAS ONCE MY HUSBAND KILLED MANY PEOPLE. HE LURKED FREELY IN DIMWOOD FOREST, ELUDING ALL EFFORTS TO FIND HIM.
I FELT I MUST DO WHAT OTHERS HAD FAILED TO DO.
IT IS A TALE OF HATRED AND REVENGE.
"I HEARD THE FIEND SNEAKING NEAR THE HOUSE, SO I TOOK THE REMAINING RIFLE AND SET OUT IN THE SNOW.
"SOON I CAUGHT SIGHT OF HIM. HE LED ME ON.

"IT WAS DEEP WINTER. FURBOL HAD JOINED A POSSE, BUT THEY WERE LOOKING TOO FAR NORTH.
"A RECENT SNOWFALL MADE IT EASY TO FOLLOW HIM-- PERHAPS HE WAS LURING ME. HE IS CUNNING.
"I FIRED, BUT I WAS TOO FAR AWAY FOR A GOOD SHOT."
DIE, YOU EVIL BASTARD!
"I MISSED. HE WAS GONE.

"HE SUDDENLY APPEARED."
POW
"I FIRED--AND THIS TIME HE STAGGERED."
GOD DAMN YOU, YOU CRAZY BITCH. YOU'LL PAY FOR THAT!
OOARGH!
GLIK KLAK
"I PRESSED MY ADVANTAGE, AND TOOK ANOTHER SHOT."
POW
MILDRED, YOU'VE KILLED ME!

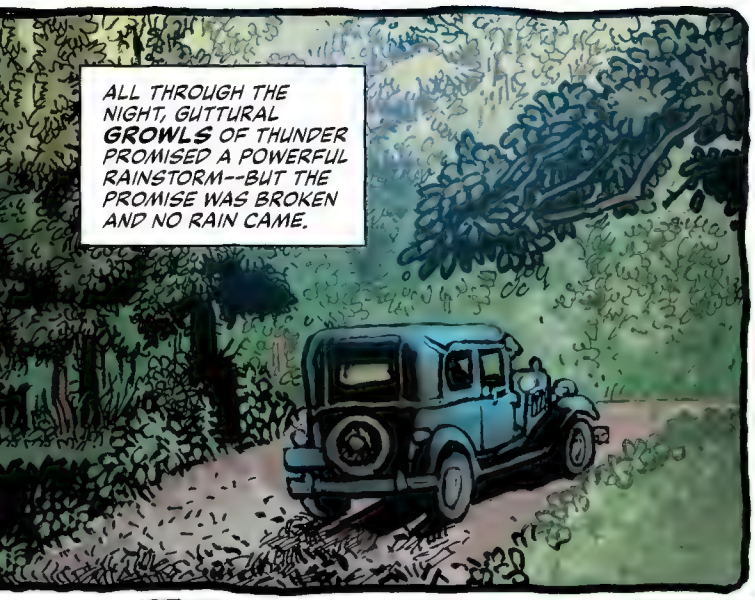
"I THOUGHT HE WAS DONE FOR. I SAW HIM BLEEDING."
BURN IN HELL!
"ANGER AND DETERMINATION MADE ME CARELESS WHEN I APPROACHED HIM."
GRRR!

"THE BEAST WAS ON ME, AND THE RIFLE WAS GONE.
"HE BIT ME VICIOUSLY.
"NOW I WAS HELPLESS."
HEH, HEH, HEH! THIS'LL COOL YOU OFF!
KRAK!

"THEN HE WANTED TO TORMENT ME FOR HIS OWN ENJOYMENT."
COME ON UP FOR AIR, DEAR!
GASP!
SPLOSH!
SPLOSH!
WHICH WILL IT BE THAT KILLS YOU--THE FREEZING COLD OR DROWNING?
HA HA HA!

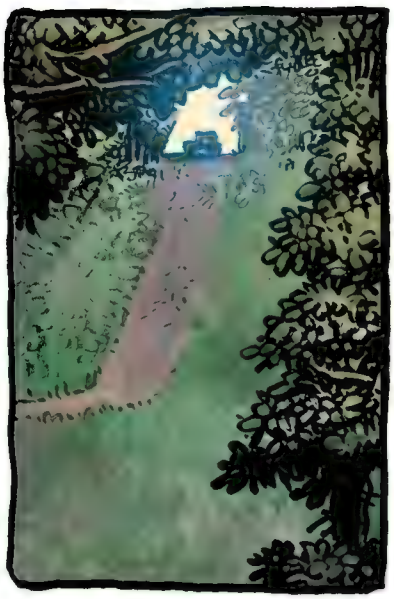
ARE YOU DEAD YET? I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.
I'M GOING TO EAT YOU, AND THEN I'M GOING TO EAT YOUR CHILDREN, ONE BY ONE.
DON'T WORRY. XERA WON'T GET LEFT OUT. SHE'LL COME BACK, AND I WILL GET HER, TOO.
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?
WHAT'S THAT--?
THAT GODDAMNED FURBOL!
"FURBOL IS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD HAVE FINISHED HIM, BUT IT STARTED SNOWING AGAIN."

MRS. DIM MUST HAVE FOLLOWED HIM.
I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO PICK UP HIS TRAIL, NOW.
"THE BEAST HID MY BODY IN A SNOW-COVERED THICKET AND FLED.
"IT WAS SPRING WHEN THEY FOUND ME."
OH, MOTHER--
THAT FOUL THING WILL MEET HIS END SOON. I DON'T WANT HIM TO GET YOU FIRST.
YOU MUST LEAVE, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. GOODBYE.
MOTHER, IT'S SO HARD FOR ME TO BELIEVE YOU'RE GONE. I WANTED TO SEE YOU AGAIN SO BADLY!
THAT'S YOUR MOTHER? SHE'S A NICE GHOST.
YES, KAREN. I THINK SHE'S RIGHT. YOU AND I SHOULD LEAVE TOMORROW. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE WITH ME FOR A WHILE?


ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT, GUTTURAL **GROWLS** OF THUNDER PROMISED A POWERFUL RAINSTORM--BUT THE PROMISE WAS BROKEN AND NO RAIN CAME.

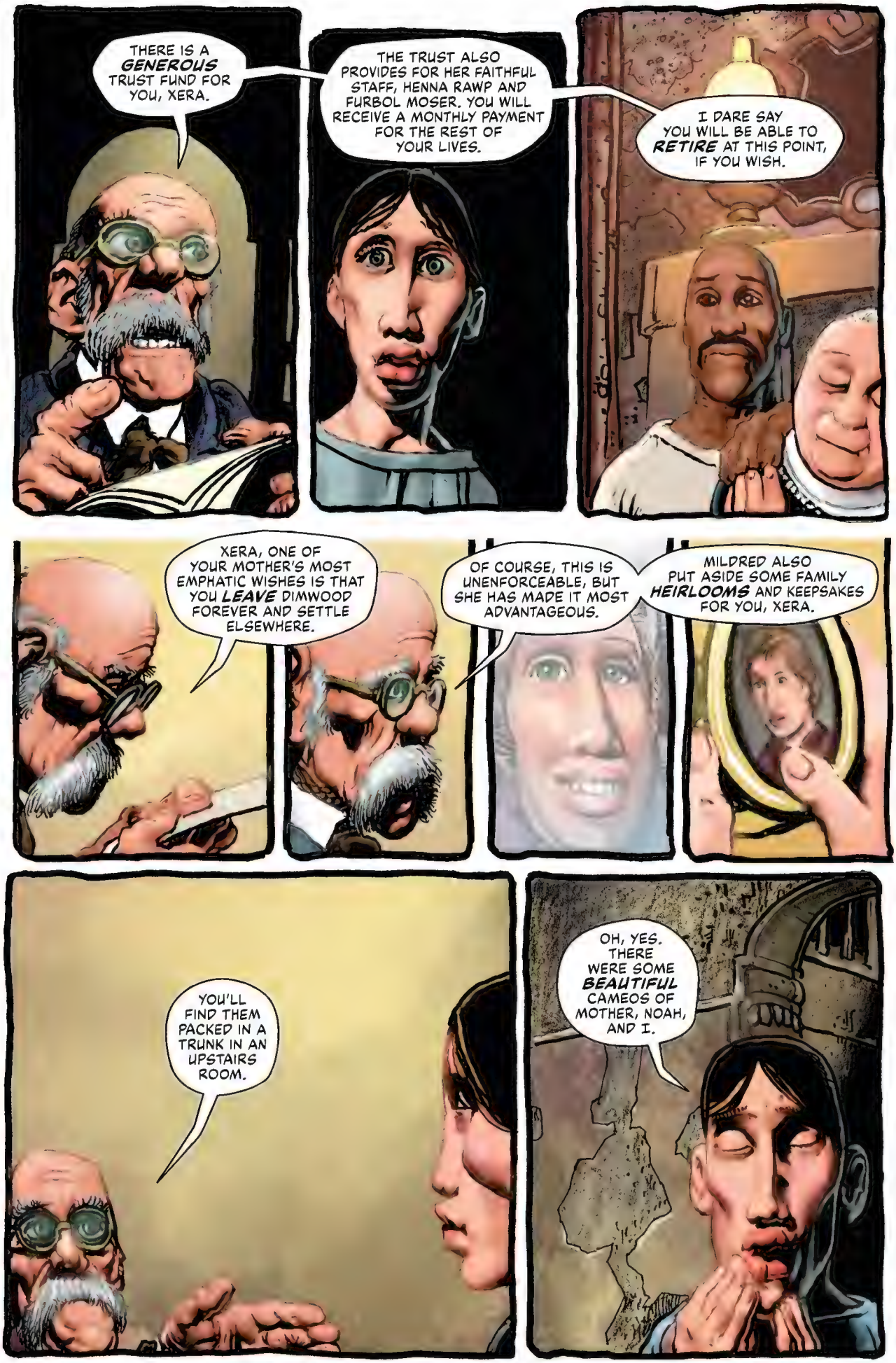
IN THE MORNING, A HOT, DRY, WOLFISH WIND BEGAN BLOWING, AND IT ROSE AND FELL IN **DEMONIC ULULATION,** TOSSING THE TREE BRANCHES.

TITUS RUCKMAN MUTTERED **NERVOUSLY** TO HIMSELF AS HE DROVE TO HIS APPOINTMENT WITH YOUNG XERA DIM AT THE DIMWOOD MANSION--THE MYSTERIOUS **EPICENTER** OF UNSPEAKABLY GRISLY DEATHS AND WEIRD DISAPPEARANCES IN THE DEPTHS OF THE VAST FOREST.



I WORE THESE WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE. WE'LL GET SOME NEW THINGS FOR YOU, LATER.
OH, THANK YOU, MISS DIM. THEY'RE NICER THAN ANY I HAD BEFORE.

HELLO, HENNA, FURBOL.
THAT'S TITUS RUCKMAN, YOUR MOTHER'S LAWYER. HE'S PROBABLY COME ABOUT THE WILL.
HELLO, MISS DIM; WE MET AT THE FUNERAL.
YES, COME IN.
I WOULD LIKE TO GO OVER YOUR MOTHER'S ESTATE. THIS WON'T TAKE LONG.
SOME OF HER WISHES ARE *UNUSUAL*--BUT THEY ARE LEGAL. I SAW TO THAT.
MILDRED PREPARED FOR THIS VERY CAREFULLY, AND SHE HAD SUBSTANTIAL HOLDINGS AS WELL AS THE FORESTED LAND AROUND THE HOUSE.


THERE IS A GENEROUS TRUST FUND FOR YOU, XERA.
THE TRUST ALSO PROVIDES FOR HER FAITHFUL STAFF, HENNA RAWP AND FURBOL MOSER. YOU WILL RECEIVE A MONTHLY PAYMENT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIVES.
I DARE SAY YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RETIRE AT THIS POINT, IF YOU WISH.
XERA, ONE OF YOUR MOTHER'S MOST EMPHATIC WISHES IS THAT YOU LEAVE DIMWOOD FOREVER AND SETTLE ELSEWHERE.
OF COURSE, THIS IS UNENFORCEABLE, BUT SHE HAS MADE IT MOST ADVANTAGEOUS.
MILDRED ALSO PUT ASIDE SOME FAMILY HEIRLOOMS AND KEEPSAKES FOR YOU, XERA.
YOU'LL FIND THEM PACKED IN A TRUNK IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM.
OH, YES. THERE WERE SOME BEAUTIFUL CAMEOS OF MOTHER, NOAH, AND I.

THAT CONCLUDES OUR BUSINESS. PLEASE CALL ME IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS. I HAVE OTHER BUSINESS IN TOWN, SO I WILL GO NOW. GOODBYE, HENNA, FURBOL, AND XERA.
OH, I ALMOST FORGOT. THIS IS FOR YOU, FURBOL.
WHAT IS THIS?
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT IS. GOODBYE.
VURRRMM
SCREECH
WILL YOU AND FURBOL BE LEAVING, TOO?
YES, DEAR. WE HAVE BOTH MADE OTHER PLANS.

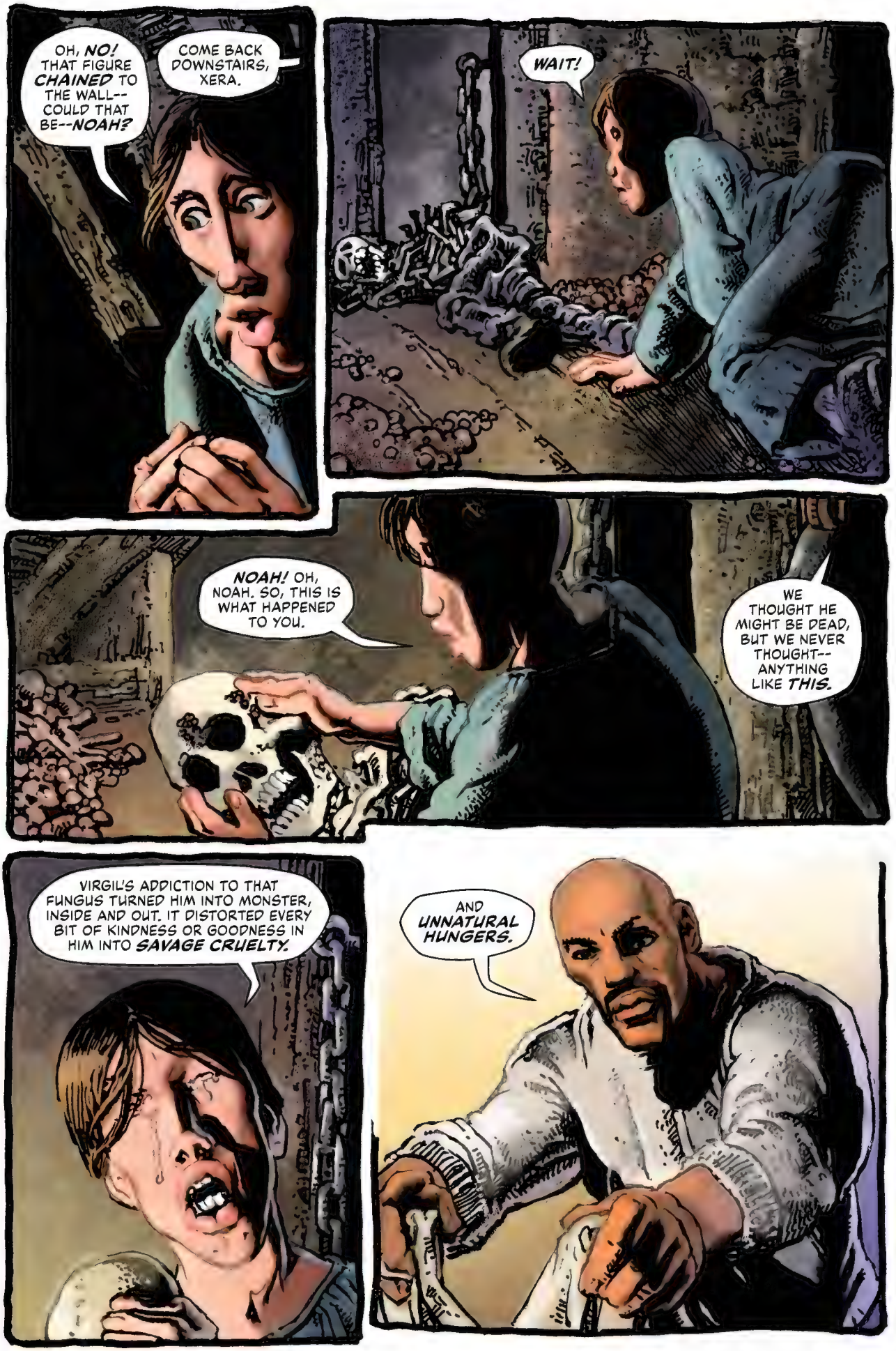
CAN WE GO NOW?
NOT YET, KAREN. I HAVE TO GET MOTHER'S LAST GIFTS FROM UPSTAIRS.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO UP THERE AGAIN.
IT'S OKAY. FURBOL WILL HELP US AND PROTECT US.
FURBOL, COULD YOU HELP US FIND THE KEEPSAKES?
UH--YES. I'LL BE RIGHT THERE.
WHAT'S HE DOING?

LET ME CARRY THE LAMP.
WHAT'S THE PIPE FOR?
THE GUNS ARE ALL MISSING. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU MIGHT NEED A PIPE.
I THINK THE HEIRLOOMS ARE PACKED IN HERE.
I CAN'T FIND THEM. JUST OLD CLOTHING.
OH--!
HERE! LOOK, IT'S A MINIATURE OF MOTHER. IT'S BEAUTIFUL. AND A LOCK OF HER HAIR.
OH, THESE ARE LOVELY. THIS IS NOAH. AND ME.

I'LL CHERISH THESE, ALWAYS.
THIS PAINTING.
THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT IT. IT HINGES OPEN.
HENNA, PLEASE TAKE KAREN BACK DOWN-STAIRS.
WHAT'S THAT?
BLOOD! OLD AND DRY. OH! UGHHH! AND THAT ODOR!
THIS IS REALLY BAD! STAY BACK, XERA.

THERE'S A PASSAGE BEHIND IT!
YOU SHOULD GO BACK.
NO! I HAVE TO SEE--
OH!

XERA AND FURBOL STOOD FROZEN IN SHOCK, A HORRIFIC TABLEAU SPREAD BEFORE THEM-- THE GRISLY REMAINS OF SCORES OF MURDERED AND CANNIBALIZED HUMANS, CACHED IN THIS HIDDEN ATTIC CHAMBER.
SLOWLY, XERA REALIZED THAT ONE FACE HAD FEATURES SHE RECOGNIZED.
IS IT--IS IT MOTHER?
XERA, HONEY, STAY BACK.
YES, XERA; IT IS YOUR MOTHER.
OH, GOD! BUT WHY IS SHE HERE?
VIRGIL HAS BEEN ACTIVE, PROWLING AROUND. AND WE KNOW HIS TUNNELS UNDER THE HOUSE AND CEMETERY. I WONDER IF HE WANTED TO GET HER UP HERE SO HE COULD-- GLOAT OVER HER SOME MORE.


OH, NO! THAT FIGURE CHAINED TO THE WALL-- COULD THAT BE--NOAH?
COME BACK DOWNSTAIRS, XERA.
WAIT!
NOAH! OH, NOAH. SO, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU.
WE THOUGHT HE MIGHT BE DEAD, BUT WE NEVER THOUGHT-- ANYTHING LIKE THIS.
VIRGIL'S ADDICTION TO THAT FUNGUS TURNED HIM INTO MONSTER, INSIDE AND OUT. IT DISTORTED EVERY BIT OF KINDNESS OR GOODNESS IN HIM INTO SAVAGE CRUELTY.
AND UNNATURAL HUNGERS.

GNAGGRH!!! GNEH, HEH, HEH, HEH! FOUND MY PANTRY, DID YOU?
XERA, MY DEAR! I'M DELIGHTED TO SEE YOU, ALL GROWN UP. YOU LOOK DELICIOUS!
XERA! GET OUT OF HERE!
GRRRR-RAWW-RGGGHHH!
THWAK!
UGGHH!

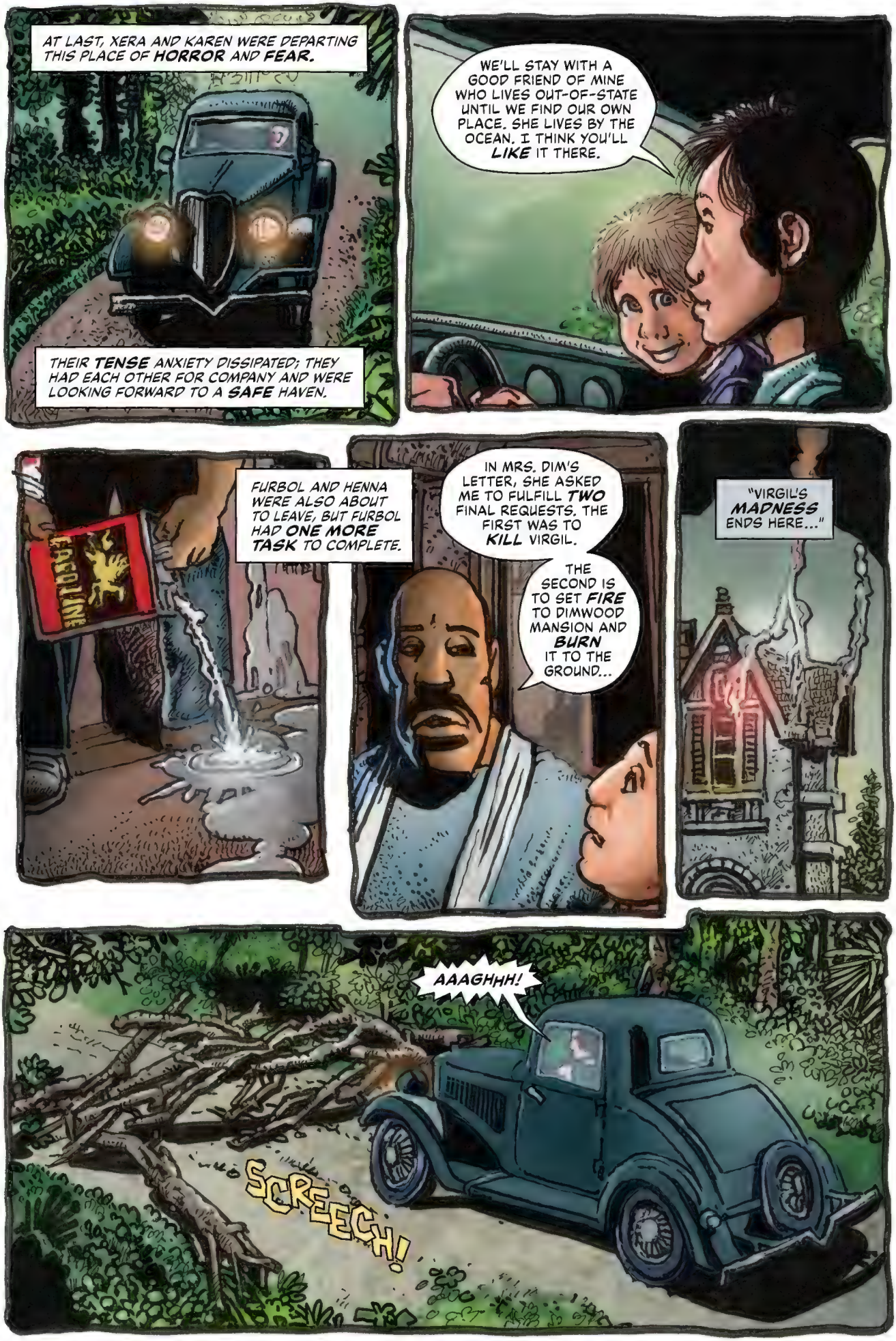
KRAK!
GNYAAA-AAGGHHH!
KRAK! KHUD! THUD!
CHOMP!
UNGH! YOU CAN'T STOP ME, FURBOL!
AAAGGHH!
NO! NO!
CHUNK!

STAY BACK! I'LL BASH YOUR HEAD IN!
OOOGHH— YOU THINK?
MMMMMH-- XERA--YOUR FLESH--I'VE WAITED A LONG TIME--
RAAGHH!
AGGHH!

YOU'RE DONE MURDERING PEOPLE! TIME TO *END* YOU!
GNNNN- UURRRGH!!! UNGGHHH!!!
CHUNK!
CHUNK! CHUNK!
SPLAT!
SPLAT!
FURBOL, YOU'RE *HURT!*
THERE. THAT'S *DONE.*

YOU'RE BLEEDING REALLY BAD. LET'S GET BACK DOWNSTAIRS.
YES. TIME TO LEAVE THE DEAD.
R.I.P.
I FINALLY KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO NOAH... AND MOTHER.
FOR A LONG TIME, I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO REMEMBER CLEARLY ALL THE BAD THINGS THAT HAPPENED HERE.
"I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO FORGET, NOW."

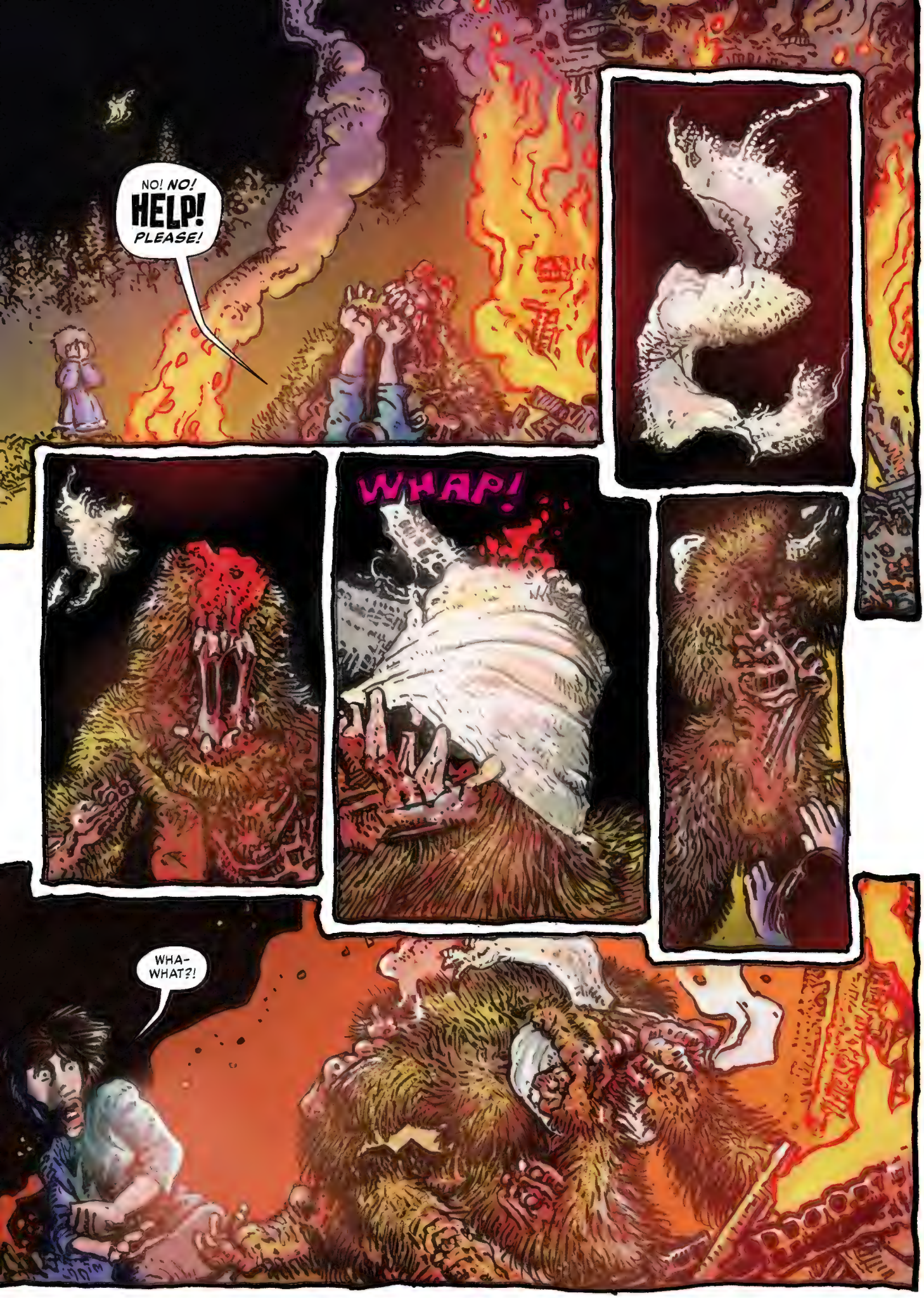
XERA, THE LETTER THAT TITUS RUCKMAN HANDED ME WAS FROM YOUR MOTHER. SHE WANTED ME TO KILL VIRGIL, SO THAT YOU WILL BE SAFE--
--SO THAT EVERYONE WILL BE SAFE AND THERE WILL BE NO MORE MURDERS.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S OVER.
OKAY, KAREN, WE'RE READY. IT'S TIME TO GO.
DEAR, IT'S BEEN SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
HENNA, PLEASE WRITE TO ME! I'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU.
I PROMISE, XERA. YOU, TOO!
OH, I WILL MISS HER.
FURBOL, ARE YOU READY?
ALMOST.
I STILL HAVE ONE MORE THING TO DO.


AT LAST, XERA AND KAREN WERE DEPARTING THIS PLACE OF HORROR AND FEAR.
THEIR TENSE ANXIETY DISSIPATED; THEY HAD EACH OTHER FOR COMPANY AND WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO A SAFE HAVEN.
WE'LL STAY WITH A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE WHO LIVES OUT-OF-STATE UNTIL WE FIND OUR OWN PLACE. SHE LIVES BY THE OCEAN. I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT THERE.
FURBOL AND HENNA WERE ALSO ABOUT TO LEAVE, BUT FURBOL HAD ONE MORE TASK TO COMPLETE.
GASOLINE
IN MRS. DIM'S LETTER, SHE ASKED ME TO FULFILL TWO FINAL REQUESTS. THE FIRST WAS TO KILL VIRGIL.
THE SECOND IS TO SET FIRE TO DIMWOOD MANSION AND BURN IT TO THE GROUND...
"VIRGIL'S MADNESS ENDS HERE..."
AAAGHHH!
SCREECH!

HENNA SAID THERE'VE BEEN A LOT OF DEAD TREES FALLING DOWN THIS YEAR. I'M SURE THAT'S ALL THIS IS.
I SAW A SIDE ROAD JUST A LITTLE WAY BACK. WE CAN GO THAT WAY.
BUT WE'RE GOING BACK TO THE HOUSE.
PPRRR
FURBOL HASN'T LEFT THE HOUSE YET. WE'LL FIND HIM AND ASK FOR DIRECTIONS.
OH, MY GOD!
SCREACH

THE HOUSE WAS BEING DEVOURED BY A RAGING CONFLAGRATION, THE INTENSE HEAT RADIATING OUT INTO THE VERDANT, CLAUSTROPHOBIC SURROUNDINGS, AND A TOWER OF DARK, CHOKING SMOKE RISING HIGH ABOVE.
FURBOL???
KAREN! HONEY, WAIT, WE'LL LOOK TOGETHER.
WHERE'S FURBOL?
GNA-AAGH-GHHHH!!!

GNAGH-HA-HA-HA! GOTCHA, XERA! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU AND EAT YOU...AND THE LITTLE GIRL FOR A TASTY DESSERT--OR PERHAPS I'LL SAVE HER FOR A SNACK.
KAREN, RUN AWAY!
WUUUAARGH!
GNAGH-HA-HA! IT'S JUST YOU AND ME, NOW, XERA. I'M SURE YOU'LL BE DELICIOUS.


NO! NO!
HELP!
PLEASE!
WHAP!
WHA-
WHAT?!

THUD!
GNAA-AAARGH!!!
UUURRRGH!!
GNAAAAH!
AAAWWRRGH!!
XER--
AH--AH--
HHH...

THERE THEY ARE!
XERA! KAREN! MY DEARS!
WE'RE OKAY. IT'S OVER.
VIRGIL WAS STILL ALIVE? YOU HAD TO KILL HIM?
I DIDN'T.
IT WAS NOAH. PROTECTING ME. NOAH KILLED HIM.
AS THE FIRE DWINDLED, THEN DIED AWAY, SATED FROM CONSUMING DIMWOOD MANSION AND THE CHARRED REMAINS OF VIRGIL, THEN XERA AND KAREN, FURBOL, AND HENNA DEPARTED THE SITE, SECURE THAT THE RAPACIOUS DIMWOOD DEVIL HAD TRULY, FINALLY, BEEN OVERCOME.
THE END

COLORING CORBEN

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA

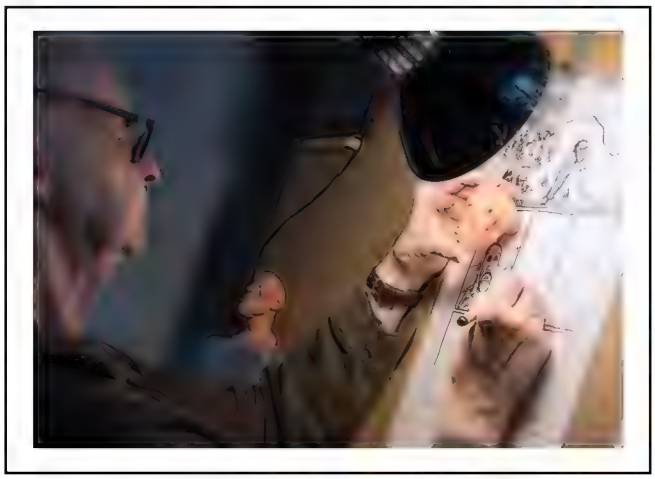
In 2001 I wrote my first article about Corben, which, like this one, I titled "Coloring Corben." It was done for the deluxe oversized reprint that Marvel Comics published of my first collaboration with the master: *Cage*. The story had been first presented as a five-issue miniseries for their Max imprint, and it was written by Brian Azzarello. As a fan of Corben's work since I was a teenager, I had been practically begging Marvel's then editor in chief, Axel Alonso, to let me color whatever comics Corben would do. The first one turned out to be *Startling Stories: Banner*, but I was not chosen for it. Instead, Edgar Delgado and his Studio F were selected. The following year, Corben drew *Cage*. Axel decided to assign the ongoing *Incredible Hulk* series to Studio F and finally give me the opportunity to color Corben. For this, I will always be thankful to Axel.

I vividly remember opening a package I received containing the original line art for the first few pages. Corben's masterful rendering and shading in stippling blew me away; the pages had a life of their own. After scanning them, I began coloring in a style I specifically developed for the art, digitally painting it with color transitions rendered in small dots and adding textures to reflect the story's dingy environment. Axel loved it. Corben, however, not quite. He wrote me a very polite but clear email requesting something different, even providing a sample image for me to follow. I was very flattered by his guidance. But when I saw the test panels, I was very surprised. I had always associated his work with three-dimensional rendering and saturated color, but he had asked me for the opposite: pastel colors applied flatly and some smooth gradients. It was totally different from what I had seen him do before, but of course I followed his directions. A few weeks later, I received a gift from him, a big package containing five gorgeous life figure drawings, which I immediately framed and which still hang in my living room. He also sent a postcard of a painting by Andrew Wyeth to express his satisfaction with the adjusted colors. I couldn't have been happier.

Over the years, I got to color other projects by him: *Ghost Rider*, *Starr the Slayer*, *Conan the Cimmerian*, *Men of War*, and several covers. Also, in 2012, with the full support of my friend and editor Philip Simon, I undertook the restoration of the stories in *Dark Horse's Creepy Presents Richard Corben*. It was a huge task, and Corben was fully cooperative, sending me scans of as many original pages as he still had. In many cases, he thought the comics were unsalvageable due to either their original poor printing or the deterioration of the art. But he was very pleased with the results. Over the years, we continued to correspond, and I assisted him as much as possible when he asked for technical advice about coloring, mainly to help expedite the process. I even put him in contact with my friend and assistant at the time, Cassie Scheuer, who became his flatter in his later projects. I was always happy to chat with him about anything. Corben considered Dave Stewart and me not just colorists but artists, and I was delighted whenever we worked together. Each new project was an event.

Everyone who knew and admired Corben was shocked by his passing in 2020. He was as vital as ever, had never retired, and had so many more stories planned. And now that seemed like it was not meant to happen. However, he left us a posthumous gift: a major 120-page graphic novel he had nearly completed. He had written, penciled, inked, and colored (with the help of his daughter, Beth) almost all the pages. I was very moved when his widow, Dona, and Beth asked me to help finish it. They specifically asked me to add rendering and textures to the last

23 pages to match the rest, a task that was ironically the opposite of Corben's initial instructions on *Cage*. It was quite a challenge, but I do love a challenge. Beth had colored all the pages in the flat hues agreed upon with her father, and Corben had finished rendering the first 97 pages. It was left to me to complete the rest. I meticulously studied the work to match Corben's application of highlights, shadows, textures, lighting effects, and color holds. When I finished and delivered the pages, I held my breath. Dona and Beth were very pleased with the results, which meant the world to me. *Dimwood* was finally completed!



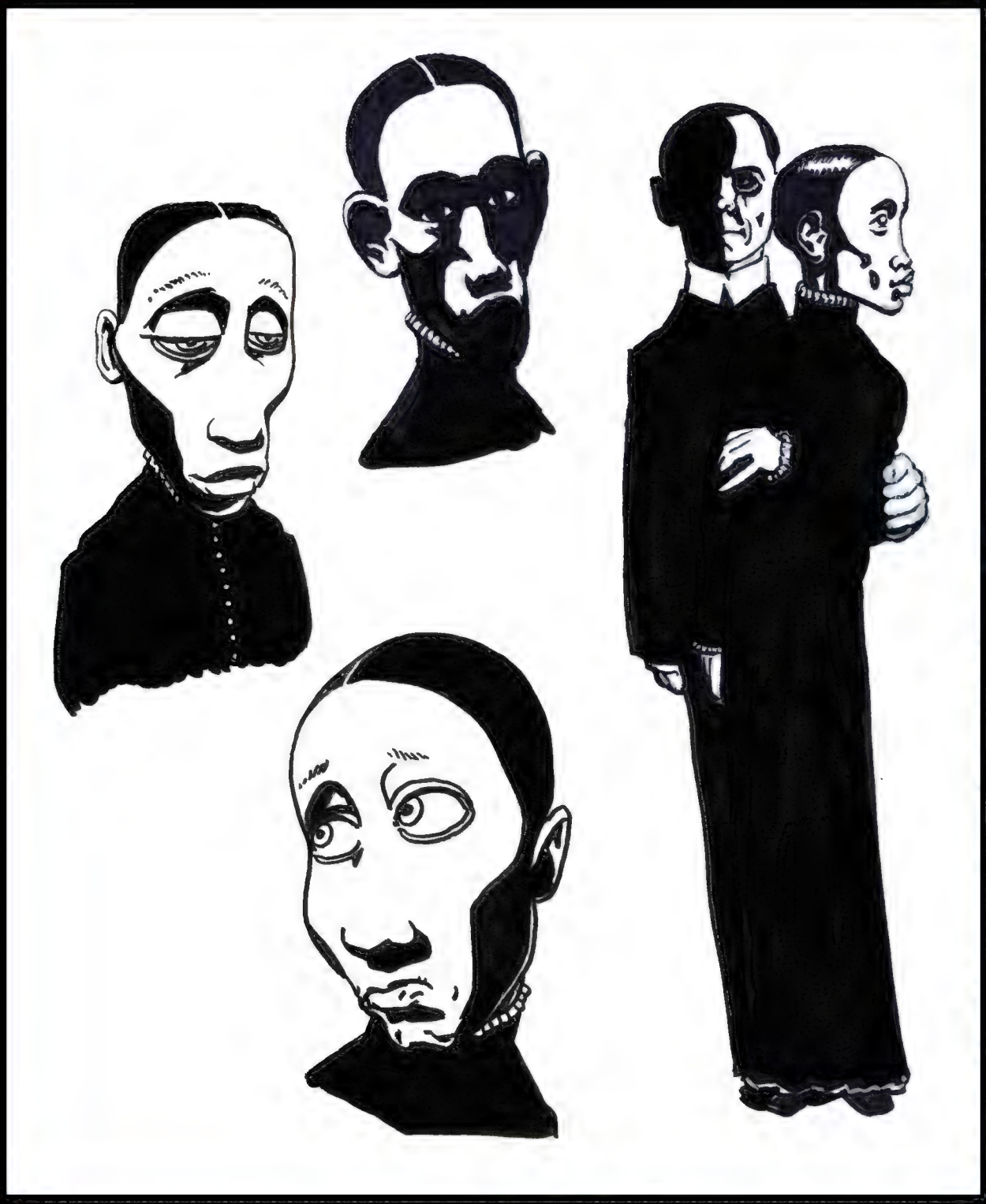
Now, it is being presented as part of the Dark Horse Richard Corben Library, where I have been involved in restoring and overseeing the artistic direction of the five volumes featuring his best-known character, Den. It has been incredibly fulfilling to reintroduce these exciting sword-and-planet adventures to new readers. The books are now being translated into multiple languages, including my native Spanish, for numerous new editions, cementing internationally the legacy of this visionary creator.

Corben never stopped imagining adventure stories in fantasy or science fiction settings which featured heroes like Den, such as Denaeus and Tugat (*Murky World*). However, in the last two decades, much of his work focused on gothic horror. He produced two collections of new versions of Edgar Allan Poe's tales, *Haunt of Horror: Edgar Allan Poe* and *Spirits of the Dead*. Additionally, he illustrated *Haunt of Horror: H. P. Lovecraft* and created an anthology of new short horror stories titled *Shadows on the Grave*. Corben also completed two graphic novels inspired by Lovecraft, *Ragemoor* and *Rat God*. Like these stories, *Dimwood* is set in a world haunted by malevolent supernatural beings. It stands as a remarkable capstone to Corben's later career, showcasing his continued mastery of the horror genre.

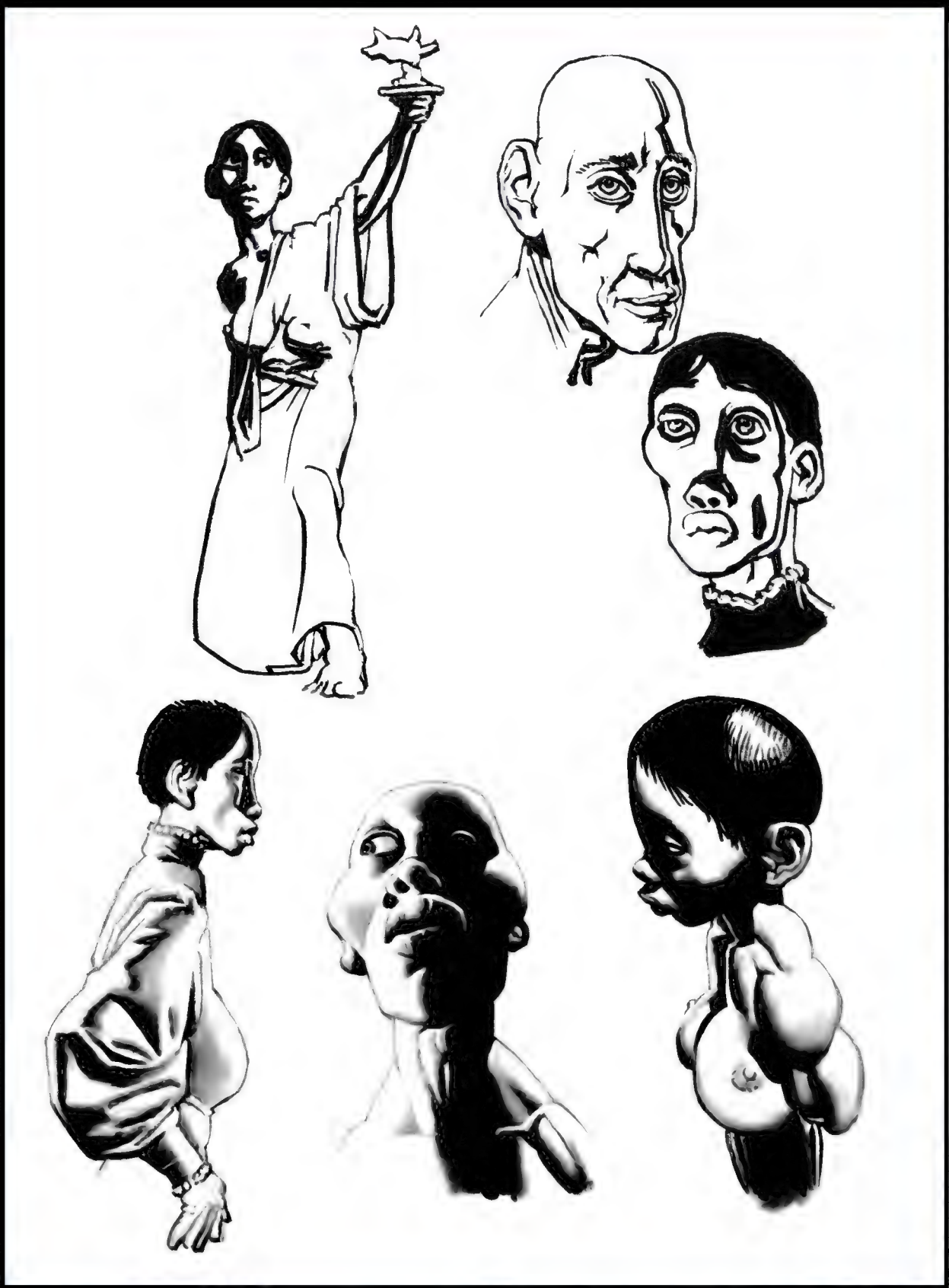
One of the last photographs I have seen of Corben, taken by Dona, shows him at his drawing table, holding a small sculpture of the head of his character Xera Dim with his left hand and copying it on paper with his right hand. He was drawing page 120, the last one of *Dimwood*. This image is a lesson from which all artists can learn. His creativity never ran dry, and he never cut any corners when making those ideas visible. He used his own handmade reference figures for even his more idiosyncratic and stylized characters. That level of passion for the work is palpable in each page of *Dimwood*, a testament to his meticulous attention to detail and commitment to his craft. It is a powerful reminder of the dedication required to bring the best of one's artistic vision to life. For me, it has been an absolute honor to be included as a small part of this, his last journey, and to witness firsthand the culmination of his lifelong devotion to the art of storytelling.

José Villarrubia
Madrid, July 15, 2024

DIMWOOD™ GALLERY



Sketches and material for *Dimwood*.



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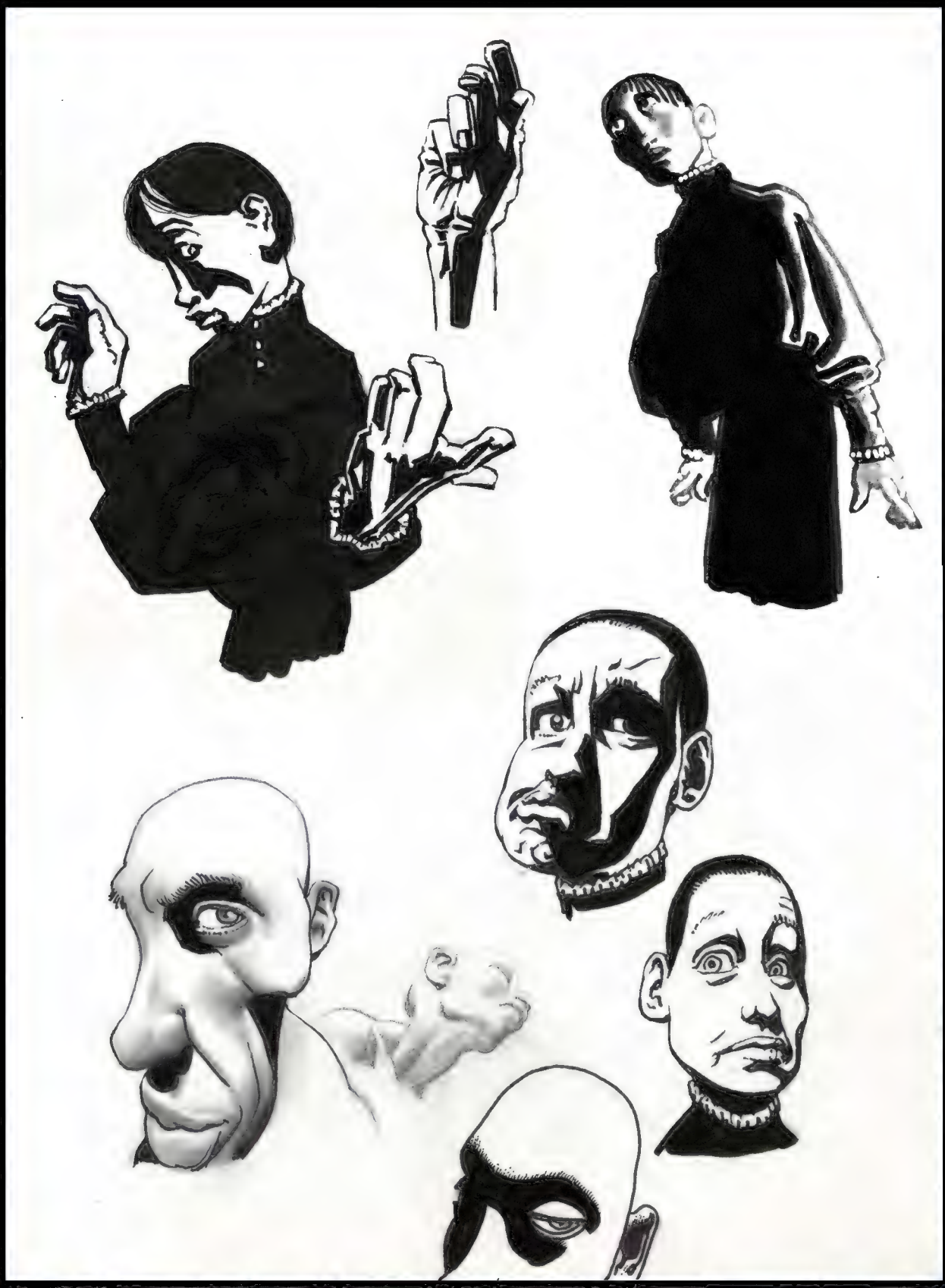

Sketches and material for *Dimwood*.

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Sketches and material for *Dimwood*.

Richard Corben was born in Missouri and grew up in Sunflower, Kansas, a community that worked for the Sunflower Ordnance Works, an army plant that manufactured bombs in World War II.

Corben drew comics all of his life. An early effort was a series of comics about the adventures of TRAIL, the family dog. Later, he created imitations of Tarzan and Brothers of the Spear. He also showed a keen interest in animation by turning many pads of paper into animated flipbooks.

While attending the Kansas City Art Institute, he concentrated on basic drawing and painting, developing skills that would become vital in creating his chosen realistic style. At that time, his college offered no courses for animation, but by using his father's 8 mm movie camera, Corben nevertheless produced a 5-minute animated film highlighting the labors of Heracles as his senior project.

After graduation, Corben wanted to go to New York to launch a career in comics or animation, but he was shy and timid, and put off such a drastic move. After working in construction for his father for a while, he found a local job as an artist/animator/cameraman in a Kansas City industrial film company. During this time, despite his shyness, he found a girl to marry him.

After nearly ten years at the film company, Corben felt frustrated that he really hadn't given his art career a chance. He started drawing so-called "underground" comix and fanzines at night after working a full-time job during the day. About this same time, Warren Publishing Company began a series of black-and-white horror comics, CREEPY, EERIE, and VAMPIRELLA. This was a perfect match for Corben's interests, and he drew several stories for CREEPY on speculation. Unfortunately, none of these were accepted. But the "wannabe" comic book artist persisted and even met James Warren at a science fiction convention. Finally, Warren and his editor, Bill Dubay, relented and started sending Corben scripts to draw. At last, a foothold was established in his comic career. Even with the responsibilities of a wife, a daughter and a mortgage, the young artist now felt confident enough to quit his full-time job at the industrial film company and devote all his time to drawing.

The underground comix surge spread to Europe, and requests to reprint Corben underground features began to appear. His fantasy character, DEN, was created for the American underground comic, GRIM WIT; DEN was next printed in the French METAL HURLANT, and then printed in the American HEAVY METAL. During this era, Richard and Dona started FANTAGOR PRESS, a publishing company featuring Richard's comics. Unfortunately, the business wasn't enough to support them. Next, Corben began drawing for American comics—D.C., MARVEL, DARK HORSE, and others.

Corben believed that maintaining drawing skills required constant practice. He regularly attended life drawing classes all throughout his career. He found the activity both an ongoing challenge and a source of pleasure.

His love and interest in animation continued throughout his lifetime and motivated him to create digitally animated movies he shared on his web site and Facebook page.

Richard was married for 56 years to Dona, and is the father of watercolor artist and comic book colorist, Beth. His life and love was devoted to his family and his art. He was a humble man and an extremely kind, good man.

Richard Corben died December 2, 2020.

"Dive into the belly of the beast. And be amazed."
–JOE LANSDALE

Well known for his legendary fantasy underground masterpieces published by Fantagor Press as well as *Heavy Metal*, Richard Corben's work has been recognized internationally having been awarded one of the most prestigious recognitions in comics literature the Grand Prix at Angoulême as well having been inducted into the Will Eisner Award Hall of Fame.

In the densely vegetated forest of Dimwood, a young woman returns to her family home after many years' absence. Xera has gaping holes in her memories of her childhood and family, as obscured and dim as the surrounding forest. In Dimwood Mansion, with its decaying, labyrinthine levels she seeks the missing pieces of her past and makes connections with mysterious disappearances and gruesome murders in this original gothic tale, Corben's final graphic novel.

Dimwood is the next book in a series of deluxe graphic novels from renowned creator Richard Corben's library to be published by Dark Horse Comics. This special edition collects the never before published graphic novel *Dimwood*, created with color assistance from Corben's daughter Beth Corben Reed and finishing work on the last three chapters from long-time Corben collaborator José Villarrubia, allowing *Dimwood* to be published as a complete graphic novel. Comes with bonus material, letters by Nate Piekos of Blambot, and an introduction by Joe Lansdale, all presented in a gorgeous hardcover with a dust jacket.

DARK HORSE BOOKS
FANTAGOR PRESS